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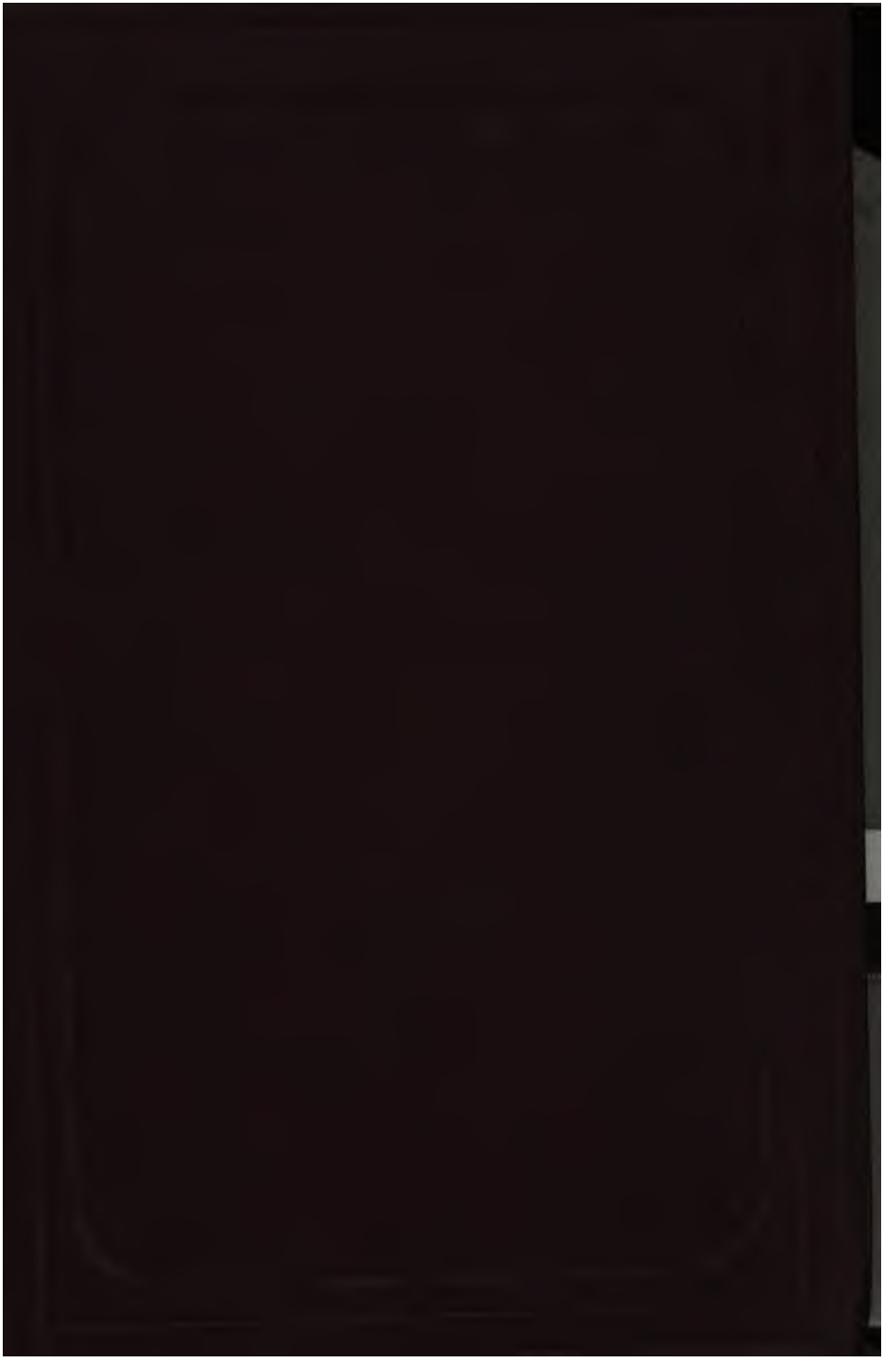

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MYDDLETON POMFRET.

A Novel.

BY

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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BOOK V.

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HYLTON CASTLE.

IX.

THE LEGEND OF DAME ALMERIA.

"You have not told me one thing, Miss Bracebridge," remarked Sir Norman, after a pause. "Have you seen the ghost?"

"The ghost!" exclaimed Mrs. Daventry. "You don't mean to say the house is haunted?"

"Don't be alarmed, aunt," remarked Eva, smiling. "I sleep in the haunted chamber, and have never been disturbed. Sir Norman pretends that he has seen the ghost more than once, but I can't believe him. I suppose there is some story

connected with your castle spectre?" she added, glancing at him.

"A story that forms the darkest page in our family annals," he replied. "You shall hear it. My ancestor, Sir Digby Hylton, who flourished in the time of James I., and enjoyed the favour of that monarch, had a remarkably beautiful wife, of whom he had the misfortune to be jealous. It cannot be denied that Dame Almeria gave him cause for jealousy, for he intercepted a billet to her from the Earl of Southampton, which appeared to confirm his worst suspicions. But this cannot extenuate his conduct, though it may explain it. Much against her will, and sorely to the annoyance of her numerous admirers, and of the enamoured Earl of Southampton in particular, the lovely Almeria was removed from court, brought down to this castle, confined to her chamber, and rigorously watched by her lord."

"Served her quite right, I think,' remarked Mrs. Daventry.

"Yes, if that had been all, Sir Digby's conduct might perhaps be excusable," returned Sir Norman, "but he went a little too far. Not unnaturally, Dame Almeria tried to escape from her thraldom, but she could not elude Sir Digby's vigilance, and he threatened, if she made another attempt, to shut her up in a dungeon, which still exists in the lower part of the castle."

"I have seen the dungeon," said Eva, with a shudder, "and a dreadful place it is. Surely Sir Digby could never have had the barbarity to carry out his threat?"

"You shall hear," replied Sir Norman. "Failing in her attempts to escape, Dame Almeria was indiscreet enough to write a letter to the Earl of Southampton, detailing her sufferings, and imploring him to liberate her from her tyrant lord.

The letter fell into the hands of Sir Digby, and so incensed him, that, with the aid of a devoted groom, he tied a sheet round her face in order to stifle her cries, and then dragged her down a secret staircase to the dungeon. There he left her alone, as he said, to commune with herself and repent. I won't harrow your feelings by attempting to paint the frightful anguish which she must have endured. Enough to state the result. When Sir Digby visited her next day, a terrible spectacle was presented to him. The unfortunate lady had attempted to lay violent hands upon herself, but she still lived. Her senses, however, were gone, and her raven locks had become white. Filled with remorse, Sir Digby instantly conveyed her to her own room, and would have tended her in person, but his presence inspired her with such horror that he did not dare to come near her. To make an end of this tragical story, I

must state that the ill-starred dame never recovered. After lingering for a few months, bereft alike of reason and of her personal charms, death released her."

"A tragical story indeed," said Eva. "But what happened to Sir Digby? I hope he was properly punished for his cruelty."

"He was killed at the battle of Naseby. His compunction, however, does not appear to have been lasting. He married again, but took care to choose a wife whose personal attractions should not cause him disquietude. But I now come to the supernatural part of my story. Shall I proceed?"

"By all means," cried both ladies. "Pray go on."

"After Dame Almeria's death, Sir Digby caused the apartment in which the sad occurrence took place to be shut up. A report soon spread among the household that the chamber was

haunted. Strange noises were heard within it at dead of night, and those who were bold enough to watch declared that they had seen the door, which they knew to be locked, fly open, and a female figure, draped in a white garment that looked like a winding-sheet, glide forth, and pass down the secret staircase. Following the phantom, they saw it reach the door of the dungeon, and then disappear. Such is the legend. The secret staircase, I may say, has been long walled up, so that Dame Almeria has had no opportunity of late years of continuing her midnight rambles in that direction. But a fruitless attempt was made to lay the ghost with the other restless sprites in the Red Sea. The spirit could not be exorcised. Not one, I believe, of Sir Digby's male descendants, myself included, who has slept in the haunted chamber, but has seen Dame Almeria. I have seen her twice. On both occasions I beheld—or fancied I

beheld, for of course I might have been dreaming —a female figure swathed from head to foot in a winding-sheet."

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Mrs. Daventry. "I declare I wouldn't sleep in the room for the world."

"I am not the least afraid," observed Eva. "While professing to have seen his ancestress, Sir Norman admits that he might have been dreaming at the time."

"You want to spoil my ghost story," he rejoined, laughing. "But I can assure you it is a veritable family legend."

"I suppose my maid Susan has heard of Dame Almeria, though I charged Mrs. Austin not to tell her about the ghost," said Eva. "She positively refuses to sleep in the dressing-room."

X.

ON THE TERRACE.

ALMOST immediately afterwards they quitted the dining-room, and walked out upon the yew-tree terrace.

By a lucky accident, Sir Norman was left alone with Eva for a few minutes, Mrs. Daventry being obliged to re-enter the house for some trifling matter that she required. Of course the opportunity was not neglected by the young baronet.

"Do not be angry with me, Miss Bracebridge," he said, "if I once again entreat you to listen to

me. In what I have just said there was not the slightest exaggeration. I have found it utterly impossible to conquer my passion for you. I love you as devotedly as ever,—nay, do not check me, I entreat. Do not cast me off without a word. Do not condemn me to hopeless misery. Give me a chance of winning your affections."

"Were I to grant your request you would gain nothing by it," she rejoined. "Best forget me. You have suffered, no doubt. But the worst is over. Unrequited love may be conquered. Of that I am quite sure."

"You speak as if from conviction," said Sir Norman, unable to repress a pang. "My own experience proves the contrary. Love, deeply rooted, cannot be torn from the heart. I have made the attempt, and failed. Forgive me if I venture to allude to what you have just said. I trust I shall not give you pain or displeasure if I

say that I guess the import of your speech. Love like mine is quick-sighted. When you rejected me, I felt certain you nourished a secret passion. I told your guardian so."

"You told him!" she cried, turning crimson.

"I did not know as much then as I know now, or I should not have been so indiscreet. But since you confess that your heart is free, let me have the chance of winning it."

She shook her head.

"I will not allow my affections to be again fettered, if I can help it. I am much happier as I am, and mean to continue so."

"Remember that the love you felt was unrequited. That makes all the difference. I ask only to become your suitor. At any time you can dismiss me."

"But will you take a dismissal?" she cried, laughingly. "It would seem not."

"I will retire at the slightest word. But I am sanguine enough to believe that you will never utter that word."

"One stipulation I make before assenting, and I expect rigorous adherence to it. You are not to talk to me of love."

"Rather a hard condition that. But I agree."

"Another stipulation. You are not to speak to my guardian on the subject—without my express permission."

"Why not?"

"Don't ask me for a reason. Do you agree?"

"Oh, certainly. I will agree to anything you impose."

"Since you agree generally to obey my behests, I need not make any further conditions. But understand. I hold out no hopes, and if you are disappointed—as very likely you may be, notwithstanding your sanguine expectations of success—you will have no right to complain."

"That is perfectly understood. If I fail now, I won't complain."

At this moment Mrs. Daventry was seen descending the steps leading to the terrace. They went to meet her.

"The groom has just returned from Mrs. Carew's," she said. "Mr. Pomfret is going on most favourably. We shall soon have him back."

Naturally, this satisfactory report gladdened the hearers. The party then took a few turns upon the terrace. The conversation that occurred is scarcely worth repeating, but the young baronet's animated manner and joyous expression convinced Mrs. Daventry that he had not been repulsed. At last the ladies re-entered the house, and then Sir Norman felt that he must tear himself away.

Mrs. Austin had a word to say to him on his departure, and was enchanted to learn that he was coming over again next day. With a lightened heart he rode back through the avenue.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Daventry to her niece, as soon as he was gone, "I am now quite sure that it will be your own fault if you are not Lady Hylton. Shall I tell you what passed through my mind when I watched you and the handsome young baronet as you were walking on the terrace just now?"

"No, don't aunt. I won't listen to it. I am sure it's some silly nonsense."

XI.

SOPHY TAKES REFUGE AT HYLTON CASTLE.

How Eva spent the rest of the day, and how she got through the evening, it boots not to inquire. She retired to her room early. She had made light of the grim legend of Dame Almeria, but it now recurred to her, and caused a sensation of something approaching to terror.

Susan, having performed her duties, had withdrawn and left her mistress alone. The chamber looked unusually gloomy, and as Eva gazed around it, superstitious fears, such as she had never before

experienced, began to assail her. She was only deterred by very shame from recalling her maid.

All at once a slight sound caught her ear, and she almost ceased to breathe while listening to it. The door of the dressing-room, which had been recently occupied by Susan, was locked, and as she had every reason to believe, no one was there. But she now distinctly heard a slight noise within the room, as if some one was trying to open the door.

She was dreadfully frightened. Her superstitious fears had given place to well-founded alarm. Some one must be concealed in the chamber. Still, she felt safe, for the door was locked, and the key was on her side. She could see it as she held up her taper.

As she listened, there was a tapping against the door. After a while it ceased. She was then about to quit the chamber, when the tapping re-

commenced, and she fancied she could distinguish a voice.

She paused, and again listened.

The tapping became louder and more importunate, and she felt certain that she heard her own name pronounced by a female voice.

Instantly her courage was restored. Stepping towards the door, she called out in firm accents, "Who is it?"

"'Tis I!" rejoined the voice. "Pray open the door."

Eva recognised the voice, and, though surprised beyond measure, did not hesitate a moment.

She unlocked the door, and there stood Sophy.

The poor lady was in walking attire, and her looks showed that she was in great distress.

"Is it really Mrs. Montfort?" cried Eva.

"Yes, it is really your unhappy friend," replied Sophy. "You will think it strange that I should

appear before you in this manner, but, for reasons which I will proceed to explain, I wished my visit to the castle to be secret. I came here this evening, saw Mrs. Austin, and was conducted by her privily to the room from which you have just liberated me. She left me there, promising to return, but I suppose she has been prevented."

"I have seen nothing of her," replied Eva. "But I retired much earlier than usual. Possibly she may yet come. But now let me know the motive of this secret visit. Has anything happened? Can I help you? Put my friendship to the proof. You shall not find me wanting. If you require another asylum, you shall have it here."

"Your kindness quite overcomes me," said Sophy, in accents of profound emotion. "It is more than I deserve."

"How can I do otherwise than pity you, now

that I know your history?" cried Eva—"now that I know the full extent of the wrong you have endured—of the perfidy of which you have been the victim? How can I do otherwise than feel for you, when I know whose wife you have been—whose wife you are!"

"You may imagine the effort it cost me to detail to you the whole of my miserable story," replied Sophy. "But after Julian's accident I felt it was absolutely necessary you should know the entire truth, and then you could act as you might see fit. I think I was justified in revealing his secret to you, even without his consent being first obtained, because without such knowledge you might have continued in a delusion. After the confidence you had unwittingly reposed in me, I could not allow you to remain in ignorance of the truth."

"I thank you a thousand times," cried Eva.

"You have enabled me most effectually to crush a foolish passion, in which you were aware I had indulged. Poor Mr. Pomfret—I dare not call him Julian—I pity him from the bottom of my heart —but I love him no longer."

"Would he could be released from the ties that still unhappily bind him to me!" ejaculated Sophy. "His freedom would be cheaply purchased by so miserable a life as mine. But Heaven will not listen to my prayers, and take me hence!"

"Do not talk thus," cried Eva. "But tell me why you have come here."

"Dear Mrs. Carew's house is no longer a secure asylum for me, and I am compelled to fly from it. You are aware that Captain Musgrave has discovered my retreat, and has stripped me of all my resources?"

"Yes. What more?"

"He promised me solemnly, when I gave him

all I possessed, that he would never molest me again. But what is a promise to him? He has written to say that he must see me, and that if I decline to receive him secretly as before, he will force [himself into] my presence. After this, what was left me but flight? Were I to remain with Mrs. Carew, I should never be free from his persecution. I took counsel with her. I told her all. I showed her Musgrave's last letter, and she agreed with me that there was no other alternative but flight. But she advised me to see you before putting my plan into execution, and it is at her suggestion that I have come here to-night. I came here secretly, so that my movements may not be traced; but I have been obliged to make a confidante of Mrs. Austin. Indeed, I found that she was already acquainted with my unhappy story."

"I have related it to her," replied Eva. "She is perfectly trustworthy. Mrs. Carew was quite

right in advising you to come to me. Here you can have a safe asylum. No one but Mrs. Austin need know that you are in the house. If you can reconcile yourself to such an arrangement for a time, you can easily be concealed in some out-of-the-way room. There are plenty to spare. Indeed, more than half the house is unoccupied. No one visits these deserted rooms but Mrs. Austin, so that, I repeat, you will be perfectly safe."

"Nothing can suit me better than such an arrangement," replied Sophy.

At this moment the door opened, and Mrs. Austin entered the room.

"You have released the prisoner, I see, miss," observed the old housekeeper. "I should have been here long ago, but I have been preparing a little room in the untenanted wing of the house, and I couldn't get it ready sooner. I've not been able to fit it up properly, but it may serve for to-

night, and I'll make it more comfortable to-morrow, if Mrs. Montfort stays with us."

"She will stay," replied Eva. "But no one but yourself must know that she is an inmate of the castle."

"Oh, I'll take care of that," said Mrs. Austin. "No danger whatever of discovery, if proper precautions are taken. No one can enter that wing of the house without coming to me for the keys. Mrs. Montfort, I'll engage, will be quite safe there. But, if she were to pass the night in your dressing-room, Susan would be sure to find it out, and then the story would be all over the house directly."

"No doubt," said Sophy.

"We will do the best we can to alleviate your confinement," observed Eva. "I will spend as much time with you as possible, and bring you books and newspapers, and everything I can think of, calculated to cheer your solitude."

"The thought that I am free from the persecution to which I have been subjected, will make me feel quite happy," said Sophy. "I shall not heed the confinement. It will afford me plenty of time for meditation."

"Somewhat too much, I fear," remarked Eva.

"No, not too much," she rejoined. "I have renounced the world, and therefore solitude suits me. I shall look upon myself as a recluse."

"Let us go to the room at once," cried Eva. "I am impatient to see it."

"With your permission, miss, I'll just put together a few things which Mrs. Montfort may require for the night," observed Mrs. Austin.

"Take whatever you think proper," cried Eva. "My wardrobe is entirely at her service."

Mrs. Austin, having made all preparations she thought needful, and put together a tolerably large bundle of things, went out to reconnoitre,

but returned almost instantly to say that nobody was stirring, and that Mrs. Montfort might proceed to her room with perfect safety.

The old housekeeper did not carry a light, nor would she allow either of the ladies to take one, lest it might betray them, so they had to move along in total darkness.

To Eva this did not much signify, since she was familiar with the place; but Sophy was glad to take the hand extended to her by her companion.

After proceeding to some distance slowly and cautiously along the corridor, they turned into a passage on the left, leading, as Eva was aware, to the deserted wing.

Unlocking a door at the end of the passage, the old housekeeper admitted them into a vast but totally dismantled room. The windows being without curtains or blinds, the prudence of Mrs. Aus-

tin's injunction became apparent, as, if they had carried a light, their movements might have been discerned from without.

Hastily traversing a suite of unfurnished rooms, they entered another passage, mounted a short spiral staircase, and then reached the little chamber destined for Sophy's occupation.

The walls were panelled with black lustrous oak, and reflected the radiance of a cheerful fire that burnt in the grate. The chief furniture consisted of a small table, a couple of chairs, and a sofa, on which a bed had been extemporised. In other respects the room was sufficiently furnished for the purpose to which it was put.

"This was Sir Norman's room when he was a boy," remarked Mrs. Austin, "and I sleep in it occasionally myself. I can reach it without going through the dismantled rooms we have just tra-

versed, but I thought it safer to take that course to-night. You needn't be afraid of damp linen, ma'am," she added to Sophy. "The sheets are perfectly well aired, and the blankets are from my own bed. To-morrow I will make you more comfortable. You will find wine and biscuits in that basket, and I will come betimes in the morning to prepare your breakfast."

The old housekeeper then busied herself in arranging and spreading out the various things which she had brought from Eva's room, and while she was thus employed, the two ladies, who had sat down near the fire, conversed together in a low tone.

At last Mrs. Austin's task being completed, Eva thought it time to depart. Affectionately embracing Sophy, she bade her good night, promising to come and see her in the morning. While taking her departure, the old housekeeper

pointed out that the door could be bolted inside.

Sophy was then left alone, and making fast the door, knelt down beside her couch to pray.

XII.

WHAT PASSED BETWEEN POMFRET AND MRS. CAREW.

POMFRET was now so much better that the surgeon told him, one morning, that he might return to Hylton Castle when he pleased. On receiving this permission, the wounded man made immediate preparations for his departure, and had just completed them, when old Nathan informed him that his mistress would like to see him. He at once obeyed the summons, and, accompanied by the butler, proceeded to the drawing-room, where he found Mrs. Carew alone. His changed appear-

ance and extreme debility could not fail to excite the kind old lady's compassion. His attire hung loosely upon him, and the ghastly pallor of his visage was heightened by the black silk skull-cap which covered his head.

Mrs. Carew rose to meet him as he entered the room, and, after assisting the old butler to place him in an easy-chair, sat down beside him. This arrangement made, Nathan quitted the room.

After expressing in a very earnest manner his deep obligations to the old lady, Pomfret said, "I hoped to have found Mrs. Montfort with you, madam, but as I may not see her before my departure, I must beg you to express my gratitude to her, and in the strongest terms."

"You owe a far deeper debt of gratitude to her than to me, Mr. Pomfret," said Mrs. Carew, gravely. "Under Heaven, she has been the means of saving your life."

"I am quite aware of it," he replied, deeply moved.

After a short pause, he added:

"May I venture to ask, madam, whether Mrs. Montfort has made any communication to you?"

"She has told me all," replied the old lady, regarding him steadfastly.

Unable to bear her searching looks, Pomfret averted his gaze.

"She has fully explained her cruel situation to me," pursued Mrs. Carew. "Need I tell you that I pity her from the bottom of my heart? Before that explanation, I took a wholly different view of the matter. I had learnt enough from Sophy's wild expressions, when she thought you mortally hurt, to be sure that you were her husband, and I hoped that the differences which I fancied might exist between you would be reconciled. It was a vain hope. I now know the whole truth, and am aware that reunion is impossible."

A deep groan broke from Pomfret.

"It is a sad business indeed," pursued the old lady; "but you must forgive me if I say that you are to blame. The miserable position in which poor Sophy is placed is attributable entirely to your conduct."

"You judge me severely, madam," said Pomfret.

"Not too severely," she replied. "I love Sophy as dearly as a daughter, and my language is such as a mother would employ. You are the main cause, I repeat, of her misery. You put her to a trial to which no woman ought to be subjected. You led her to believe that you had destroyed yourself —nay, more, she was persuaded that you had committed the fatal act before her own eyes. It is wonderful to me that she survived the shock. For years you allowed her to mourn you as dead. Was such conduct consistent with good feeling or affection? Was it justifiable on any ground?

What might have been the consequences? True, Sophy performed the part of a devoted wife, and really remained faithful to your memory, but you had no right to count upon such fidelity. How many years of needless and profitless anxiety would a few words have saved her? Yet they were never uttered. You allowed her to consume her young life in unavailing grief."

"Spare me, madam—in pity, spare me!" cried Pomfret.

"Your excuse is, that you were engaged in making a fortune for the wife whom you had thus abandoned," pursued the unrelenting old lady. "I can perfectly understand the peculiar feelings by which you were actuated, but I consider your conduct as in the highest degree reprehensible. Morally, you are responsible for all the sad consequences that have ensued. When you first wrote to her from Madras you ought to have avowed the truth; but, instead of doing so, you resorted to

further mystification, and created the very difficulties in which she became involved. To you the consequences are calamitous enough, but to poor Sophy they are fatal. She is placed in the power of a villain, from whom there is no escape. Great as is her wrong, she is without hope of redress."

"The wrong cannot be redressed, but she can be protected from further annoyance," said Pomfret. "And this must be done effectually. You say you love her as a daughter. Will you allow her to remain with you?"

"This house is no longer a secure asylum for her," rejoined Mrs. Carew.

"She is safer here than elsewhere," cried Pomfret. "Let me see her. I can easily convince her of that."

"I will not keep you longer in suspense," rejoined the old lady. "She is gone."

"Gone!" exclaimed Pomfret, as if a violent blow had been dealt him. "Gone! without consulting me. But no! I cannot believe it. She would not leave you—her best friend."

"The step is taken, and by my advice," rejoined Mrs. Carew. "She has left this house. I would not allow her to consult you, lest her resolution might be shaken."

"You did wrong, madam," cried Pomfret, sternly. "You blame me, and justly, for what has already occurred, but if any fresh misfortunes arise, you will be responsible for them. Whither is she gone?"

"You must excuse my answering that question," rejoined the old lady.

"But she has no funds!" cried Pomfret. "She has been plundered by Musgrave of all her resources."

"You need have no anxiety on that score, sir," said Mrs. Carew. "She is not without funds. If

I had thought she could remain here safely, I should not have parted with her."

"Has anything happened to cause her further uneasiness?" asked Pomfret, anxiously.

"Yes. She has received a letter from Captain Musgrave. You shall see it. She left it with me."

With this she took a letter from a drawer, and gave it to Pomfret. Not without repugnance he opened the letter, and read as follows:

"'I must have another interview with you. I am going abroad. You may expect me on the third night after the date of this letter. I shall appear at the same hour and in the same way as before. I must, and will see you. There are other ways of entering the house than by the window, and if you thwart my plan, I shall present myself at the door.

"'SCROPE MUSGRAVE.'

"Is she never to be free from this persecution?" groaned Pomfret.

"That letter decided me," said Mrs. Carew. "I would no longer allow Sophy to remain here. This is the appointed night. If Captain Musgrave comes, he will find me in Sophy's room."

"No, madam," said Pomfret, sternly. "He must not find you, but *me*. I will be there."

"No meeting between you can take place in my house," cried Mrs. Carew, alarmed.

"I promise you there shall be no violence; but see him I must," said Pomfret. "No provocation shall force me to assail him; and, indeed, I have not strength for a personal encounter with him. But it is important to Sophy's future peace that I should see him. He has some object in seeking this interview, which he will not disclose to you, but which I may be able to extort."

"Since you promise me there shall be no vio-

lence, I assent to the plan. Under these circumstances, I presume you will postpone your departure till to-morrow."

"I must needs do so," rejoined Pomfret. "I must trespass a little more upon your kindness."

"I will go at once and countermand the carriage which has been ordered for you," said Mrs. Carew, rising. "And as this sudden change in your plans might surprise Nathan, I will tell him that I have prevailed upon you to remain till to-morrow. That will quite satisfy him. But it will be best that you should return to your own room. When the servants have retired to rest I will conduct you to Sophy's chamber."

XIII.

MUSGRAVE KEEPS HIS APPOINTMENT.

NIGHT came. Midnight. Pomfret was alone in the chamber recently occupied by Sophy.

His preparations had been made. The window was left partly open, and a light placed upon the table. But he himself was concealed behind the curtains of the bed.

All the servants had long since retired to rest, and no one was astir in the house but Mrs. Carew, who had brought him privily to the room. Her windows commanded the drawbridge, and she now

and then looked cautiously forth, but the night being dark, and a dense mist brooding over the moat, she could not distinguish any object.

Pomfret did not quit his position for a moment, but patiently awaited Musgrave's arrival. Listening intently for any sound that might announce the coming of that hateful personage, he at last distinctly heard footsteps on the drawbridge. His heart beat quick at the thought that his foe was at hand. A rustling among the leaves of the ivy next warned him that Musgrave was climbing up to the window. In another moment the visitor sprang boldly into the room, and glanced around it in search of Sophy. He did not detect Pomfret in his hiding-place.

"Where the devil is she?" he exclaimed, in tones bespeaking anger and uneasiness. "She evidently expects me, since she has left the window open and a candle burning. But why is she not here?"

Then stepping towards the door, he tried it, but found it fastened.

"Locked!" he exclaimed, with a fierce oath. "Is this some trick? No, she would not dare to play me false. She will be back presently."

He then turned, and to his astonishment and dismay found Pomfret standing between him and the window. So ghastly were the looks of the latter, that Musgrave for a moment doubted whether a living man confronted him. However, he speedily recovered his composure.

"A devilish clever manœuvre, upon my soul!" he cried, with a jeering laugh. "But it won't answer with me, I can promise you. I beg to observe, that I have come here on a peaceful errand, and merely to see my wife, who expects me. In order to avoid a serious disturbance—for serious it assuredly will be, if you attempt to molest me—I request that you will be good enough

to send her to me without delay. Understand that I wish to see her alone. For obvious reasons I must decline any conference with you. We can have no business to settle together."

"Pardon, me, sir," rejoined Pomfret sternly. "We have a very important business to settle, and till it *is* settled, satisfactorily to me, you do not quit this room."

"Judging by your haggard looks, you are scarcely in a condition to oppose my departure," rejoined Musgrave. "But I have no intention of going till I have seen my wife; and I must again beg that you will do me the favour to send her to me."

"You cannot see her," rejoined Pomfret, peremptorily.

"I rather fancy you are mistaken, sir," sneered Musgrave, "and I would recommend you, for *her* sake, and indeed for your own, not to force me to

extremities. The right, as you will find, if you provoke me too far, is on my side, and not on yours. I shall be glad to be informed why you are here; and on what pretence you meddle in an affair in which you are noway concerned? Your presence and conduct are alike damaging to the reputation of the lady whose cause you affect to espouse. How is it, I repeat, that I find you here, in her chamber, at this hour? As the guardian of my wife's honour, I am entitled, I think, to ask that question."

"Since you desire to know why I am here, I will tell you," rejoined Pomfret, his pallid features flushing, and his eyes blazing. "I am here to protect your unhappy victim. Do not imagine I am unacquainted with your errand. Not content with your previous robbery—for I will use no milder term—you have come again to attempt further extortion. But I am here to tell you, on

the part of the lady whom you have so foully wronged, that she will hold no further communication whatever with you, but if you persist in your infamous attempts, she will seek legal redress."

"I laugh at such idle threats," rejoined Musgrave, scornfully. "No one knows better than yourself that she dares not resort to legal redress."

"Do not presume too much on her forbearance," said Pomfret. "There are limits to her patience which you have already passed."

"I shall be better able to judge of that when I see her; and see her I will—even if I stay here till morning. If you want to get rid of me, you will acquaint her with my determination. I am unwilling to make a disturbance in the house, or I would go in search of her myself."

To prove that he was in earnest, he coolly

seated himself, and proceeded to light a cigarette, which he took from a case.

So indignant was Pomfret, that if he had had sufficient strength, he would have thrown him through the window; but he contented himself with saying, "I did not suppose that any one, with the slightest pretensions to the character of a gentleman, could act thus."

"Ah, indeed. A person who goes about under a feigned name is not likely to have very correct notions as to what constitutes a gentleman. At all events, the opinion of such a one does not weigh much with me."

"Dastard!" cried Pomfret, trembling with rage. "You know that you can safely provoke me."

"Since you are unwell, I would advise you, for your own sake, to terminate this interview," rejoined Musgrave. "Let me see my wife."

"I have already told you that you cannot see her. She has left this house."

"Are you speaking truth?" demanded Musgrave, looking hard at him.

"She is gone, I tell you. Your intolerable persecution has driven her hence."

"She was a fool to go," cried Musgrave, "as even you would admit, if I cared to enter into explanation with you. If she and her advisers would only act with a little common sense, a great deal of unpleasantness might be spared. However, she must take her own course. I shan't trouble myself further about her. Some one, I make no doubt," he added, significantly, "will take good care of her."

"I repel your infamous insinuation with scorn," said Pomfret. "I know not whither she has fled."

"I dare say I should find her at Hylton Castle," rejoined Musgrave. "But whether or not you have constituted yourself my wife's protector is a matter of utter indifference to me, provided, as I have just said, that I am no more troubled."

"Be sure she will not trouble you if you will leave her alone," rejoined Pomfret. "But what faith can she have in you? On the promise that you would never again molest her, she gave you all she possessed, and now you threaten her with fresh extortion."

"It is false!" cried Musgrave, fiercely. "My letter to her has been entirely misinterpreted. I came here for no such base purpose as you impute to me."

"If not for that, for what purpose did you come?" demanded Pomfret.

"I owe it to myself to offer an explanation, or be sure I would render you none, sir," answered Musgrave. "My object in coming here was to repay the money borrowed from her for a temporary purpose. I told her I was going abroad."

"You cannot be surprised if I refuse credence to this statement?" remarked Pomfret, sceptically.

"It is scarcely consistent with your previous conduct."

"Will this convince you?" cried Musgrave, taking from his breast-pocket a rouleau of bank-notes, and tossing it towards him. "There is the precise sum she lent me. Give it to her. You will easily find an opportunity of doing so, I make no doubt."

"This is more than I expected from you," said Pomfret, surprised.

"Spare me further remarks, sir," rejoined Musgrave. "I desire to go away quietly."

"Go, then," replied Pomfret, stepping aside.

Hereupon, Musgrave strode deliberately to the window.

Before passing through it, however, he looked out, and after a moment's scrutiny, came back.

"I fancy there is a man on the drawbridge," he said. "Is he set there to waylay me?"

"Dismiss the notion at once," rejoined Pomfret. "No one is on the drawbridge."

"Well, I may have been deceived by the fog. Since you assure me that a guet-à-pens is not intended, I will go."

And he passed through the window.

But he had only partly accomplished his descent, when a rough voice called out to him.

The person who called was the gardener. Thinking there were robbers on the premises, the stout old fellow had armed himself with a fowling-piece, and taken up a position on the drawbridge, with the design of cutting off their retreat.

Receiving no answer to the challenge, he repeated it more lustily, with an emphatic warning, which, being disregarded, he let fly at the supposed robber.

The shot rattled amongst the ivy-leaves, but whether much damage was done to Musgrave,

Pomfret, who rushed to the window, was unable to determine. If hit, Musgrave was clearly not disabled, for, on reaching the ground, he at once made for the drawbridge.

Here a struggle took place between him and the gardener, but the old man released him on hearing Pomfret's vociferations, coupled with those of Mrs. Carew, who threw up her window on hearing the shot; and Musgrave, with a furious oath, hurried away.

End of the Fifth Book.

BOOK VI.

BELFIELD.

I.

BOOTLE RECEIVES A LETTER FROM HIS MOTHER, AND A TELEGRAPHIC MESSAGE FROM HIS FATHER.

MR. AND MRS. BOOTLE SHELMERDINE, whom we conducted as far as Folkstone on their wedding-day, spent their honeymoon, and another month besides, at Paris. They were quartered at the Grand Hôtel.

The pretty little Englishwoman, who dressed so charmingly, and who had such fine eyes, which she knew so well how to use, soon became an object of attraction in the Bois. The incense

offered her by the cavaliers whom she daily encountered in her drives near the lakes, was far from displeasing to her. The young Parisian élégants stared very hard at her, but did not abash her. Neither did she return their audacious looks with the disdain they deserved. Bootle, who always accompanied his wife in her drives, was flattered by the admiration she excited, persuading himself that the possession of such a treasure made him an object of envy to all who beheld her.

Bootle was really very fond of his pretty little wife, and very proud of her. He liked to see her well dressed, and he liked her to be admired. This may seem odd in one who was constitutionally jealous like our friend; but there are unaccountable contradictions in human nature, and Bootle's was by no means a consistent character. No doubt there was something very piquant in his wife's coquettish manner, for she always contrived to

surround herself with admirers; and where many a far handsomer woman of a quieter turn would have been passed by with very little notice, she succeeded in attracting attention. Love of admiration was Mrs. Bootle's ruling passion. She had long desired to attach a number of captives to her car, and she was now gratified. With her the aim and end of wedded life was not quiet domestic bliss. Of that she never dreamed for a moment. Quietude and domesticity would have been no bliss to her. She never would have given her hand to Bootle if she had imagined she would be condemned to live in seclusion with him. Her notions of married life, founded upon many examples that had come under her own observation, and fortified by the precepts enunciated in her favourite French novels, were that, as a married woman, she would only have her own inclinations to consult, and she felt quite sure that Mrs. Bootle

Shelmerdine would be far more admired, far more sought after, than Miss Flaxyard. The result proved she was right.

During their stay at Paris the newly married couple made many acquaintances, both French and English; and so much attention was paid to Bootle by his new friends, that he began to think there was considerable advantage in being a married man. Sometimes he felt a little jealous, but his wife soon laughed him out of such ridiculous notions.

After a couple of months spent very pleasantly in the French capital, they were still undecided in their plans. Bootle, who was rather surfeited with gaiety, wished to return to England, and if matters could have been made comfortable with his mother, he would have liked to pass the winter at Belfield. Mrs. Bootle had no sort of objection to this plan. Bury would be a change, and she had a natural curiosity to see a house of which she expected one day to be mistress.

Mrs. Bootle had written several times to her mother-in-law, but had failed to propitiate her. The letters were handed over to Mr. Shelmerdine, and answered by him.

At last, Bootle nerved himself to the task, and wrote to his mother, saying that he and his wife were returning to England, and proposed to come at once to Belfield. A prompt reply was sent, couched in the following terms:

"My dear Bootle,—I think you had better defer your proposed visit to Belfield until the spring, when I trust I may in some degree have recovered from the mortification and disappointment which you have inflicted upon me by your marriage. At present, a meeting between me and your wife could not be agreeable to either of us. Deeply hurt as I have been, I feel I could not put a constraint upon my feelings, and my daughter-in-law might have reason to complain of her

welcome. I will not invite her till I can receive her properly.

"I am bound to state that your father is ill pleased with me for taking this course, but I must bear his displeasure, knowing that I am right.

"You tell me that your wife is greatly admired in Paris, and that whenever she drives in the Bois de Boulogne, or is seen in the Champs Elysées or on the boulevards, her personal charms and elegant toilette attract general attention.

"I can only say, in reply, that I sincerely hope all this admiration won't turn her head. In my opinion, you ought not to expose her to it; but knowing advice to be useless, I shall not offer it. Men's notions in regard to beauty seem to have vastly changed since my time. What appears to be admired now, would not have been so then. Mere charms of person, unaccompanied by breeding, refinement, and grace, would not have been

admired in former days, except by a certain class of men, whose admiration was considered a very poor compliment.

"You say that if you do not come to Belfield you will spend the winter in Rome. You will find plenty of society there, and I dare say your wife will be quite as much admired in Rome as in Paris. I am not so sure that she would produce the same effect here, as we are rather old-fashioned folks in this part of Lancashire.

"Say whatever you think right from me to Mrs. Bootle. That you may not repent your choice, is the heartfelt wish of

"Your affectionate mother,

"ELIZABETH SHELMERDINE."

"By Jove, Tiff! here's a stinger!" cried Bootle, handing her the letter.

"What a dreadful old termagant!" cried Mrs.

Bootle, after she had scanned it. "But never mind, dearest boy. We'll go to Belfield in spite of her."

"There'll be a jolly row if we do," he rejoined, laughing. "But I don't like this sort of thing. I don't approve of the tone of her letter. You shan't be affronted in this way."

"Who cares for what she says?" cried his wife, snapping her fingers. "I don't. To Belfield we will go, dear boy!—to Belfield we will go. We're safe of the governor's support."

"That's not much," observed Bootle. "It won't do to count upon him. In a dispute with the old lady he invariably shows the white feather. He's not master of Belfield, I can tell you."

"High time he should be, dearest boy," remarked Mrs. Bootle. "It's important to us to establish ourselves there. We must do so without delay."

"If I felt quite sure of the governor I shouldn't

hesitate," rejoined Bootle. "But you see he daren't write."

Just then a garçon entered the room.

"Une depèche télégraphique, pour monsieur," he said, giving him a letter. "Arrivée à l'instant."

"From the governor, I'll bet a hundred!" cried Bootle. "Now we shall know how to act. Here, read it," he added, handing it to his wife.

Mrs. Bootle tore open the envelope, and with a scream of delight read the following message:

"'*Never mind what your mother says. Bring your wife to Belfield. The sooner the better.*'

"There! what do you say to that, darling boy? Wasn't I right?"

"Of course, my love. You're always right. I fancy the old lady will meet her match in you, Tiff."

"I flatter myself she will, darling boy," re-

sponded Mrs. Bootle, confidently. "As you say, it's a great point to have the governor with us. The old lady has had her own way far too long. A little opposition will do her good, and she shall have it from me, I can promise her, as soon as we're fairly settled in the house. She has set her face against my family, but I'll have them all at Belfield before I'm many weeks older."

II.

CONTAINING MRS. BOOTLE SHELMERDINE'S LETTER TO HER MOTHER-IN-LAW.

A FEW days after this determination had been come to, Mr. and Mrs. Bootle Shelmerdine quitted Paris, and proceeded to London.

Everything was prepared for them at the Acacias, and it is almost superfluous to say that they were warmly welcomed. Both Flaxyard and his wife had missed their daughter sadly, and though anxious to get her married, as we have shown, they felt quite lonely when she was gone.

The Acacias seemed quite changed without the lively Tiffany, and was given up in a great measure to Hornby and his friends. The delight of the worthy couple at having her back again may therefore be imagined.

Mrs. Bootle Shelmerdine was now a very important member of the family indeed, and treated with proportionate respect. Hornby thought his sister wonderfully improved, though he couldn't exactly tell how, and he was greatly amused by finding that she had got, what he called, "the upper hand of her caro sposo." Bootle, however, seemed perfectly contented and happy, and if his wife "could turn him round her little finger," as Hornby insinuated, the process did not appear to be disagreeable. It must be owned that Tiffany ruled her husband in a very agreeable way. If she occasionally took him to task, and exacted implicit obedience to her will, she was, on the

whole, very good natured, petted him, amused him by her drollery, allowed him to smoke any number of cigars, and never reproved him for drinking too much claret.

But the thing that astonished Hornby most of all in his brother-in-law was, that Bootle had entirely got rid of his jealousy. When young Flaxyard had heard of the admiration excited by his pretty sister at Paris, he had pictured to himself all sorts of stormy scenes between her and her husband. He now learnt that Bootle had been enchanted by the homage paid his wife, and, what was still more surprising, that Bootle did not object to the presence of any of her former admirers. On making this discovery, Hornby of course invited Rufus Trotter and all his bachelor friends, who had been tabooed before the marriage, and many a jolly dinner-party they had.

Cheered by these dinners, Bootle passed a very

pleasant week at the Acacias, and would willingly have prolonged his stay under his father-in-law's hospitable roof, but his wife was eager to commence her projected campaign. Bootle had written to announce his return, conveying a cordial invitation from old Flaxyard, and hoping his father would run up to town; but John excused himself on the plea of business.

Naturally, Mrs. Bootle had confided her scheme to her family. Old Flaxyard had many misgivings about it. He thought the plan very hazardous, and calculated to make matters worse. At all events, he said, a little conciliatory correspondence ought to take place first.

Mrs. Flaxyard was quite of a different opinion, and in favour of a bolder policy. She had perfect faith in her daughter's management. Had she not succeeded with Bootle? Could she fail now?

Flaxyard argued that Mrs. Shelmerdine and her

son were two very different persons, and required very different management; but he admitted that his daughter had spirit and cleverness for anything, and he would not, therefore, dissuade her from the attempt.

Acting upon her papa's suggestion, Mrs. Bootle resolved to try the effect of a preliminary letter, so she sat down and penned the following:

"The Acacias, Clapham, Nov. 20, 186—.

"My dearest Mamma,—We have just returned from our delightful continental trip, and are spending a few days here with papa and mamma before proceeding to Lancashire. You may expect us very shortly. I shall not feel at all like a stranger in my new home, for darling Bootle has talked to me so much about Belfield, that I seem familiar with every room in the house.

"I should think that the large room with the

French furniture, and the dressing-room attached to it, would suit us best. If we don't like it, we can easily make a change.

"I am looking forward with the greatest pleasure to a few months' residence in Lancashire. Darling Bootle tells me that you have many very agreeable neighbours, noted for their hospitality, and that in Manchester they have excellent concerts and assemblies. I have no doubt I shall contrive to get through the winter very well.

"I must now tell you, dearest mamma, what Bootle and I have decided upon. We must have a grand ball to celebrate our arrival at Belfield. That will set everybody going. Darling Bootle says there can be no difficulty in getting dancing men, since there is a cavalry regiment in Manchester. Cards, I think, ought to be sent out at once. I fear our proposed ball may put you to a little inconvenience, but you won't mind that, once in a

way. Perhaps it might be well to have a dinner-party, followed by a musical soirée, a few days before the ball. If you approve of this suggestion, ask the nicest people you know to the dinner, including the colonel of the regiment and three or four of the officers, with lots of refreshers for the evening. As we mean to be very gay this winter, a dinner and ball will ensure us plenty of invitations.

"And now, dearest mamma, a word in conclusion. If I understand myself at all, I am of a very amiable disposition, and remarkably forgiving. In referring for a moment to the little misunderstanding which occurred before my marriage, I do so merely to say that I desire to think no more about it. It must be satisfactory to you to hear that darling Bootle and I get on together famously. He adores me—at least, he tells me so, and I am bound to believe him. When you know me better,

I am quite sure you will like me, or you will be an exception to the general rule, for everybody does like me. Mrs. Malaprop, as you know, says it is well to begin with a little aversion, and, as you disliked me at first, so I feel certain you will end by becoming excessively fond of me.

"With our united best love to dearest papa and yourself,

"Believe me,

"Your very affectionate daughter,

"THEOPHANIA SHELMERDINE."

Before despatching this letter, which she considered a masterpiece, Mrs. Bootle read it to her husband and her mother. Bootle was greatly amused by it, but Mrs. Flaxyard, though equally amused, expressed her disapprobation

"You mustn't send such a letter as that, my love," she said. "If you do, you'll never enter Belfield."

"We shall see," replied Mrs. Bootle, confidently. "I must take the high hand with the old lady. If I were to write in a humble strain, she would think nothing of me—probably decline to receive me. This letter will bring her to her senses. She will perceive that I won't stand any nonsense —that I mean to be treated properly — as her daughter-in-law should be treated—and she will give way."

"I sincerely hope she may. But I own I feel rather nervous about it."

"You are always nervous, mamma. I have no misgiving. What will you say if I ask you and papa and Hornby to the ball?"

"I shall say that you have worked wonders. But I shan't believe it till we get the invitation."

"She'll do it if she sets about it," remarked Bootle. "The little woman is equal to anything. I hope you will all come to Belfield. We shall have a jolly time of it if you do."

"Little chance of it, I fear," rejoined Mrs. Flaxyard.

"Every chance, mamma," said Mrs. Bootle. "This is the first step towards it. See this letter posted, darling boy," she added, giving it to her husband.

III.

SHOWING THE EFFECT OF THE LETTER.

THE letter was sent, and reached its destination next morning.

Mr. and Mrs. Shelmerdine were at breakfast in the spacious and well-furnished dining-room at Belfield when it was delivered. Glancing at the direction, Mrs. Shelmerdine laid it down, but curiosity getting the better of her disgust, she opened it.

A perfect explosion of rage succeeded the perusal.

"What's the matter, my dear?" inquired John, who had some suspicion of the truth.

"Read that, and you will learn," rejoined his wife, tossing the letter to him. "This is of a piece with her previous conduct, though I must say that it goes beyond any notions I had formed of her."

After scanning the letter, John laughed very heartily.

"So she wants to give a dinner and ball on her arrival," he remarked. "Not a bad idea, eh?"

"Before she gives a dinner and a ball at Belfield she must first get into the house," rejoined the lady, haughtily. "This is not a laughable matter, Mr. Shelmerdine. It is very serious—at least, to *me*. If you were not a party to the scheme, you would be shocked, and not laugh. All things considered, there never was a more impudent proceeding. After I had positively declined to re-

ceive her, she coolly writes to say she is coming, selects her own room, and enjoins me to issue invitations for a dinner and a ball to announce her arrival to the neighbourhood. Can impudence go beyond that?"

"Take a more good-natured view of the matter, my dear, and comply with her request. This letter I believe to be written at Bootle's suggestion."

"May be so," she rejoined, sharply. "But that does not alter my opinion of it. If Bootle had married a lady, I should have been delighted to have his wife with me as long as she chose to make this house her home. But here is a vulgar creature, who tries to force herself upon me whether I will or not, who dictates to me what I am to do, and almost intimates that she means to take the reins out of my hand."

"No such thing is meant, my dear," said John, in a deprecatory tone. "However disagreeable it

may be, you cannot refuse to receive Bootle and his wife, and to give them a home in this house as long as they choose to stay with us. Indeed, it is my express wish that you should do so. And I think you will do wisely, as well as kindly, to carry out their suggestions. Before Bootle's marriage opposition might have answered some purpose, but now that the step has been taken, you must reconcile yourself to it."

"Since it is your express wish, Mr. Shelmerdine, that I should receive her, I will do so," replied his wife, after a little reflection, which she aided by a cup of tea. "I should very much prefer waiting till the spring, to see how she goes on; but if you desire to have them here now I will obey, however repugnant compliance may be to my own feelings."

"Kindly and sensibly resolved, my dear," said John, "and just what I expected from you. I am sure you will like our daughter-in-law."

"To like her is an impossibility," she rejoined, in a scornful voice. "But I will strive to tolerate her. Belfield will be no longer Belfield when she sets foot in it."

"Nonsense, my dear; the house will be a great deal livelier, that will be the only difference. We want a little stirring up. I am of opinion that you will find Mrs. Bootle an exceedingly agreeable companion. Everybody seems to like her. Bootle, as you know, says she has been greatly admired on the Continent, and I feel convinced she will be very popular here."

"Amongst men, perhaps. But to me her manner is detestable. I wish I could correct it."

"Pray don't make the attempt, my dear. And since you have so kindly consented to waive your objections, let me entreat you to go a little further, and make up your mind not to meddle with our daughter-in-law. This is quite necessary for Bootle's sake. Interference with married people

always makes mischief. However, I need say no more. Your own good sense and feeling will prompt the right course to be taken. Will you answer her letter, or shall I?"

"I could not trust myself to answer it—at least in the spirit you desire."

"Then I will," cried John. "Shall I say anything about the dinner and the ball?"

"Just as you please," she rejoined, heaving a deep sigh. "I may as well resign myself at once. If anything goes wrong, the responsibility will rest on your shoulders."

"They are quite wide enough to bear it," he rejoined, cheerfully.

So he wrote a letter to his daughter-in-law, which caused her the most extravagant delight.

"You see what I have accomplished," she cried, triumphantly, after reading it to her mother and Bootle. "All difficulties have vanished before the

stroke of my magical pen. Mrs. Shelmerdine has eaten humble pie. We shall be made heartily welcome at Belfield, and are to have the dinner and the ball. So far well. But my triumph will be incomplete," she added to her mother, "unless you are all present at the ball. I will have you there."

Mrs. Flaxyard lifted up her hands.

"And she'll do it, too, since she says so," remarked Bootle, who was lost in admiration of his wife's generalship. "Never was such a wonderful little woman!"

When old Flaxyard and Hornby came home from the City, and the good news was imparted to them, they could scarcely credit it.

That night there was great rejoicing at the Acacias, and an immense deal of Laffite was imbibed by the young men.

IV.

THE ARRIVAL AT BELFIELD.

BELFIELD—whither we now propose to conduct the reader—is pleasantly situated on the slope of a hill, about a couple of miles to the north of Bury, on the road to Haslingden. It is a large white mansion, of formal but imposing appearance, and overlooks a country agreeably diversified with hill and valley, with brown bleak moors, and a bolder and higher range of hills in the distance. The view from the terrace, comprehending the adjacent town of Bury, with Bolton on the one hand, and Roch-

dale on the other, would be very striking, but for the evidences afforded to the beholder that he is in the midst of a populous manufacturing district. Cotton-mills—the ugliest structures ever devised by man—offend the gaze on all sides, and darken the air with the smoke from their tall chimneys. The fields are converted into bleaching-grounds, and the once clear rivulets, coursing through the once charming valleys, are polluted by dye-works, and empty themselves into the Irwell, which flows past the grounds of Belfield on its way to Manchester.

Our worthy friend Mr. Shelmerdine, we are quite aware, differs from us most materially in regard to the charm of the prospect commanded by his residence. In his eyes the picture has no blemish. He does not dislike cotton factories—not he!—neither does he object to print-works nor to bleach-works. The dingy colour of the Irwell does not offend him, and he rather likes

to look upon the cloud of smoke hanging like a pall over distant Manchester. His earliest associations being connected with this district, it still retains a strong hold upon his affections. Nothing to his mind can be more beautiful than the neighbourhood of Bury, and he would not change his large formal mansion, with its uniform ranges of windows, its stately Ionic columns, its rustic stone basement, and broad double flight of steps, leading to the principal entrance, for the oldest and most picturesquely situated hall in Cheshire.

From the stately terrace of Belfield our worthy friend can distinguish a miserable row of cottages —such cottages as are only to be seen in a manufacturing district. In one of the poorest of those hovels dwelt his mother—he never knew a father's care—and she has long since been released from toil and misery. John's eye often wanders in the direction of that lowly hut, and he thinks of his early struggles and aspirations. His ambition was

to become a millowner, and by prudence and indomitable perseverance he has realised the dream.

While making his way to wealth, Mr. Shelmerdine often said that when he had sufficient means he would build the handsomest mansion in the neighbourhood of Bury. He kept his word, and built Belfield, which he flatters himself *is* the handsomest and best-situated house in the neighbourhood.

Mrs. Shelmerdine, whose associations are different from those of her husband, and who likes old mansions and well-timbered parks, and abominates factories and dye-works, would fain have had him purchase a place in Cheshire. But John would not listen to the suggestion. Having built Belfield, he resolved to stay there.

We must not find fault with Belfield, or we shall forfeit our friend's good opinion; but we confess that, like Mrs. Shelmerdine, we should prefer a place in Cheshire. However, that is mere

matter of taste. Beyond dispute, Belfield is a very fine mansion, and possesses a vast number of spacious apartments. The magnificent entrance-hall is adorned with busts, statues, and groups of marble, executed by modern Italian sculptors. The dining-room, which will accommodate no end of guests, has a coved ceiling, supported at one end by pillars, and its walls are covered by the best specimens of modern art. Then there is a vast saloon, gorgeously fitted up in the style of Louis XV. Another and somewhat smaller morning-room has a conservatory attached to it. Besides these, there are several other apartments on the same floor—namely, a library, a billiard-room, and a smoking-room. A splendid staircase conducts from the entrance-hall to the upper story. Here many of the rooms are spacious, and all lofty and well furnished. Owing to the number of windows and the width of the passages, the house has a remarkably light and cheerful air.

The grounds of Belfield, though not very extensive, are nicely laid out. The shrubberies, which of course were planted by our friend, are getting on tolerably well, but unquestionably the place looks too new. It wants timber; and something, perhaps, besides timber. The tallest trees among the plantations are poplars, and these add to the formal character of the edifice. A large lawn, smooth and soft as velvet, is spread out in front of the mansion, and in summer the parterres and borders are embellished by the choicest flowers. There is also an excellent walled-in garden, with hothouses and greenhouses. The slopes on the farther side of the hill are skirted by the Irwell, which bounds our friend's property in this quarter; but the river, owing to its Stygian hue, does not enhance the beauty of the scene.

About half-past nine, on a fine frosty day towards the end of November, Mr. and Mrs. Bootle Shelmerdine left the Euston station for Bury. The

young couple were accompanied by two French servants, whom they had brought with them from Paris—namely, Monsieur Emile Pochet, a very fine gentleman, who condescended to serve Bootle in the capacity of valet, and Mam'selle Léontine Latrompette, Mrs. Bootle's pretty and extremely coquettish femme de chambre.

Mam'selle Léontine, a lively brunette, whose chief personal attractions consisted in a pair of remarkably fine black eyes, capable of any expression, and two ranges of small pearly teeth, which she took frequent occasion to display, and Monsieur Emile, whose jet black hair was cropped close to the head, and whose sallow cheeks were so carefully shaven that they looked perfectly blue —these two personages, we say, who knew nothing more of England than had come under their observation between Dover and London, were tolerably well pleased with the country through which they travelled till they reached Stockport. Then

the forest of tall chimneys that burst upon them as they crossed the viaduct that carries the railway over the town, the smoke-begrimed buildings, and the reeky atmosphere filled them with intense disgust.

"Mon Dieu! what a frightful town!" exclaimed Léontine. "A thousand times worse than Lille."

Monsieur Emile never had had the misfortune to see Lille, but he felt sure it could not possibly be so bad as Stockport.

Manchester, which seemed almost to begin when they got out of Stockport, heightened their disgust, and they gazed almost with horror at the huge, black, many-windowed piles that rose before them on all sides.

"What a city! what buildings! what a populace!" exclaimed Emile, piteously. "Till now, I had no idea what perfidious Albion was like. Execrable country! We must go back to Paris,

mam'selle. I cannot exist in an infernal region like this."

Léontine quite concurred with him in opinion, and they continued to abuse everything they beheld till they arrived at Bury, when the necessity of attending to their master and mistress turned their thoughts in another direction.

Mrs. Bootle had shared the sentiments of her suivante. Stockport and Manchester, as seen through the windows of the coupé occupied by herself and darling Bootle, had positively appalled her. Never having been in this part of the country before, she had but a very imperfect notion of what a large manufacturing town is like. Nothing so ugly as those clusters of factories, with the surrounding dingy habitations, had entered into her ideas. With a sickening heart she turned to her husband, and said,

"I hope Bury is not like this, dearest boy."

"Ten times worse," replied Bootle, who was

tranquilly enjoying a cigar. "At Bury there are twice as many cotton-mills, five times as many chimneys, and the air is so full of smoke that you can't swallow it."

"I can't swallow your description, dear boy," she rejoined. "But if it really is worse than this, I shall soon bid adieu to Belfield."

"Well, you'll see what it's like presently."

The aspect of the country improved as they went on, and by the time they reached their destination Mrs. Bootle had quite recovered her spirits. Attired in a most becoming toilette de voyage, of which a blue velvet mantle trimmed with sable formed the most conspicuous feature, and wearing the prettiest little chapeau rond that ever came from the Rue Vivienne, she looked charming in the eyes of Papa Shelmerdine, who was waiting her arrival on the platform. Kissing her very heartily as he helped her out, he at once conducted her to a well-appointed barouche which was drawn up

close by, and while doing so attempted some apologies for the absence of his wife. Mrs. Bootle, however, quickly relieved his embarrassment by saying that she didn't in the least expect to see her.

Having bestowed his daughter-in-law safely in the barouche, John then returned to Bootle, who, with the aid of his own valet and his father's footman, Broadbent, was getting sundry cloaks, wraps, and other articles out of the coupé. Mam'selle Léontine was standing by, and perceiving that she could be of little use, John good naturedly took her to the barouche, and placed her opposite her mistress. A discussion next took place between father and son in regard to the enormous quantity of boxes which Mrs. Bootle had brought from town; the result being that Broadbent, "a very intelligent chap," according to John, was left in charge of a van-load of milliners' boxes and trunks. This important matter settled, Mr. Shelmerdine

and Bootle got into the barouche, the old gentleman seating himself beside his pretty daughter-in-law, of whom he felt not a little proud, and Bootle taking the only vacant place, which of course was next to Léontine, while the gentleman-like Emile mounted to the seat erstwhile occupied by Broadbent. In this manner they drove off, exciting the admiration of a number of persons on the platform, who had lingered to witness their departure.

Whether it was that she was gratified by her reception, or determined to see everything *en beau*, Mrs. Bootle appeared delighted with Bury. John pointed out his mill to her, and though it exactly resembled one of the large factories she had seen at Manchester, boasted as tall a chimney, numbered as many windows, smoked just as much, and made just as great a din with its machinery and engines, she professed to be wonder-struck by it, and told her dearest papa that he must take her over it one of these days, which he readily promised to do.

Even Léontine was in ecstasies at the sight of the grand bâtiment. Bootle smoked his cigar quietly and said nothing, but a twinkle in his eye betrayed his thoughts.

A splendid pair of horses being attached to the barouche, and Pollard, the coachman, putting them along as soon as he got out of the town, which was crowded with waggons, the party soon reached the rather ostentatious lodge that guarded the entrance to Belfield. The gate was thrown wide open, and the good dame who occupied the lodge with her daughter—the latter being a fair specimen of a Lancashire lass — curtseyed respectfully to Mrs. Bootle, and said something which that young lady did not understand, though she guessed its import. The mansion, now coming full in view, elicited a genuine burst of admiration from Mrs. Bootle, and sundry exclamations of rapture from the irrepressible Léontine.

"Ah! quelle jolie campagne! c'est délicieuse—

superbe!" exclaimed the soubrette. "Madame doit être bien heureuse ici—et moi aussi."

Mr. Shelmerdine did not talk much French. In fact, he didn't speak the language at all, but Léontine's looks and gestures were so expressive that he could not fail to understand her. Her enthusiasm gratified him. Whether Léontine's raptures were feigned or not, we won't pretend to say, but Mrs. Bootle really was struck by the appearance of the mansion. It was a much finer place than she expected, and she told Mr. Shelmerdine so with a frankness that charmed him. Not being called upon to express any opinion, Bootle never took his cigar from his lips, but laughed to himself at what was said. The drive to the house was skirted by a plantation, and fenced off from the meadows by iron hurdles, and, the gentle ascent being at length surmounted, the carriage drew up at the foot of the nearest flight of steps. Mr. Knowles, the portly butler, and two footmen in the Shelmer-

dine livery, were on the steps, but no Mrs. Shelmerdine could be seen.

John alighted first, and conducted his daughter-in-law into the house — the swing-doors being thrown wide open by the bowing servants. He detained her for a short time in the entrance-hall, under pretence of pointing out the various objects to her, and hoping his wife would appear; but being disappointed in the expectation, he took his daughter-in-law to the drawing-room.

The only person who went with them was Bootle, Mr. Knowles no doubt comprehending that his presence at the meeting might not be desirable.

Mrs. Shelmerdine was seated in a fauteuil near the fire at the farther end of the spacious saloon, and was too much engrossed, we may suppose, by the newspaper she was reading to notice their entrance. At all events, she did not look round, or change her posture in any way, till admonished

by her husband, who called out rather loudly, "My dear!—Bootle and his wife!"

She then arose, deliberately laid down the newspaper, and advanced with a slow and dignified step to greet her daughter-in-law. Bootle watched the proceedings through his eye-glass, prepared to support his wife if occasion should require it.

Nothing daunted by her mother-in-law's cold and repelling looks, and feeling that something must be done, Mrs. Bootle sprang forward, and flinging her arms round the proud lady's neck, kissed her affectionately. The embrace, we may be sure, was not returned, and as soon as Mrs. Shelmerdine could release herself, without offering a word of welcome, she prayed her daughter-in-law to be seated, and addressed herself to Bootle, probably intending to favour him with a maternal salute, but the irate young gentleman drew back.

"No, thank you, ma'am!" he cried. "Much obliged to you all the same. If you won't kiss my

wife, you shan't kiss me. I didn't bring her to my father's house to be treated in this style, I can tell you. Let us have no more of it, if you please.'

Never before having been addressed in such language by her son, Mrs. Shelmerdine was quite taken aback.

"How silly you are, dearest boy!" cried Mrs. Bootle. "What would you have dear mamma do? She has given me a most cordial reception."

"Has she!" cried Bootle. "Then I don't know what a cordial reception is."

"I'm sure I'm delighted to see *you*, my dear," observed his mother.

"Bother!" cried Bootle. "Behave properly to my wife. Say you're glad to see her, and I shall be satisfied."

Mrs. Shelmerdine did not say this, but seated herself in a stately manner beside her daughter-in-law, expressing a hope that she had had a plea-

sant journey from town—expressing a further hope that she had left Mr. and Mrs. Flaxyard and Mr. Hornby quite well.

All quite well. Nothing could be pleasanter than the journey. Darling Bootle and herself had occupied a coupé, and he smoked all the way.

"Very agreeable," remarked Mrs. Shelmerdine, dryly.

"Yes, I don't mind the odour of a cigar in the least. I never interfere with my darling boy's enjoyments. I'm afraid you will think I spoil him sadly, for I let him do just what he likes. The old people are in capital preservation, and desire all sorts of kind messages to you. They are longing to see Belfield."

"I hope they will soon run down, and have a look at us," remarked John.

"Of course they will," said Bootle, greatly to his mother's horror.

But her dismay was increased when Mrs. Bootle added,

"If quite agreeable to you, dear mamma, I should like to ask them and Hornby to the ball."

"We'll talk about that by-and-by," rejoined Mrs. Shelmerdine, evasively.

"Well, to tell you the truth, dearest mamma, I have already invited them," said Mrs. Bootle. "I thought I might venture to do so."

"Invited them!—without my sanction!" cried Mrs. Shelmerdine. "You have taken an unheard-of liberty. I shall put off the ball."

"No, no, my dear. The ball cannot be put off," said John, gravely and firmly. "It is quite proper that our new relations should be invited, and as I have just said, I shall be very glad to see them. In the presence of my daughter-in-law, whom I am proud and happy to welcome here, I declare that I like her family, and am better pleased that my son has connected himself

with them than if he married a duchess. Mr. Flaxyard cannot object to me on the score of my humble origin, neither can I object to him for a like reason. We have both made our own way in the world. The match, therefore, between our children is perfectly suitable. Don't let family pride stick in your throat, my dear, but gulp it down as you would a bitter draught, and have done with it."

The draught was too bitter for Mrs. Shelmerdine. She made a wry face, but could not swallow it.

"I must stand up for papa and mamma, at the hazard of giving you offence, ma'am," said Mrs. Bootle. "They are very nice people—though, perhaps, I ought not to say so—very much liked in their own society——"

"And not in the least vulgar," supplied Mrs. Shelmerdine.

"Not half so vulgar as many other people who

are proud of their musty ancestors," retorted Mrs. Bootle. "If not well born, they are well bred, and always show proper consideration for the feelings of other people. If I am to remain in this house, papa," she added to him, "they must not be excluded from it."

"They shall not be excluded," said John, emphatically. "They shall come to the ball."

"Oh! thank you, dearest papa! thank you!" cried his daughter-in-law.

"Mr. Shelmerdine, you are master here, and can do as you please," said his wife; "but I beg that the invitation may not be sent in my name."

"It has already been given in mine," observed Bootle. "I knew the governor wouldn't object."

"You judged him quite right, my boy," said John. "Your wife shall ask anybody she pleases —anybody."

"Oh! you are the dearest and best papa in the

world!" cried Mrs. Bootle, with effusion. "But I shall always consult dear mamma—if she will let me."

"Consult *me!* That is quite unnecessary, after what Mr. Shelmerdine has said. I am no longer to have a voice in my own house, it appears."

"Nonsense, my dear," said John. "No interference whatever with you is intended. But I wish my daughter-in-law to feel perfectly at home here, and to do exactly what she likes."

"Then she is mistress, and not I, and I may as well resign my authority at once."

"Papa does not mean anything of the sort, dear mamma," cried Mrs. Bootle. "Be sure that I have no intention of usurping your authority. Perhaps I resented your remarks upon the elderly parties at home rather too strongly, but I trust you will forgive me, on reflection."

"You were quite right to stick up for them, Tiff,' said Bootle. "I won't allow them to be run down."

"You are a degenerate boy, Bootle, and have no proper pride," rejoined his mother.

"Yes I have," he retorted. "I am proud of my little wife, and I fancy before long you will become proud of her too."

"Never was such infatuation," muttered Mrs. Shelmerdine.

"Infatuated or not, I'm perfectly happy, and that's the main point," said Bootle.

"Come, there must be an end of this," interposed John. "We must contrive to live together in peace and harmony. You must concede certain points, my dear," he added to his wife, "in order to make your daughter-in-law comfortable. And you, my love," he continued to Mrs. Bootle, "must study your mother-in-law, and take all she says in good part. These things attended to, we shall go on very smoothly."

"I'm quite agreeable," said the younger lady, readily.

"You don't answer, my dear," observed Mr. Shelmerdine to his spouse.

"Before answering, I should like to know what concessions I am expected to make," she rejoined.

"Only such as your own good feelings will prompt," said John. "Mrs. Bootle is to be quite at home here—to do what she likes, without the slightest interference from either of us—and may ask whomsoever she pleases."

To prevent any further rejoinder, he then proposed to show his daughter-in-law over the house, and hurried her out of the room, rejoicing that the dreaded meeting had been got over so well.

V.

MRS. BOOTLE'S LETTER TO HER MAMMA.

MRS. BOOTLE'S impressions of Belfield will, we think, be best conveyed by a letter which she addressed to her mamma about a week after her arrival.

"Belfield, Bury, Dec. —, 186—.

"I sent you a hurried letter, dearest mamma to announce our arrival here; but I have purposely delayed writing again till I could tell you exactly what I think of the place. I am delighted

with Belfield, and with all belonging to it—with one important exception.

"Darling Bootle is not half so attentive to me as his papa, who makes the greatest possible fuss of me, and never likes me to be out of his sight. With madame la mère I am now on tolerably good terms. We hate each other just as heartily as ever, but have agreed to keep the peace, and though we have now and then a little sparring, in which I am sure to get the best of it, being the lighter and quicker of the two, we never come to actual fisticuffs. What we may do one of these days I won't say, for my angelic temper is often ruffled; but, if there should be a fight, it will be a good one, I can promise you.

"Immediately after our arrival we had a slight set-to, in which both Bootle and the governor backed me up, and, as you may suppose, with so many against her, the old lady was obliged to give in. This acted as a caution. However, I

am never alone with her if I can help it, and I always make Bootle accompany us in our drives. The darling boy displayed as much spirit as Mr. Moor of Moor Hall in our first encounter with this terrible old dragon of Wantley.

"Our preliminary breeze had one effect, not exactly anticipated by the old lady. It completely established my position in the house. I am to do just what I please—to invite whom I please—and am not to be interfered with in any way whatever. Such was the governor's emphatic declaration in the presence of his spouse. Oh! he is such a dear good old fellow, and I am so very, very fond of him.

"My first invitation is to you. You must all come down to the dinner on the 5th and stay over the ball, which will take place on the 10th. Both will be very grand affairs, I can tell you, and I think you will like Belfield. It will also, I fancy, gratify you to see your daughter at the

head—no, not quite, but nearly at the head of such a splendid establishment. It is astonishing how well things are done here. The cuisine is first-rate, as it ought to be, for Marcellin, our chef, is a veritable cordon bleu. Emile, Bootle's valet, declares he has never seen such dinners out of Paris. Hornby, who likes French cookery, will be enchanted.

"The establishment is immense—at least, it appears immense to me—but it is remarkably well ordered, and goes as smoothly as the spinning-jennies in the governor's cotton-mill, but without their noise. Unwilling as I am to admit it, I really think the old lady deserves some credit for her management. She makes an admirable housekeeper, and on no account would I deprive her of the place. Léontine attends to me, and Emile to Bootle. Bring Charlotte with you, if you like, but don't let Hornby bring his valet.

"Though I delight in Belfield, I can't say that I

like the neighbourhood, it is so different from anything I have been accustomed to, but I dare say I shall get reconciled to it in time; but whatever you may think, be careful to admire the view, for the one point on which Mr. Shelmerdine is sensitive is the situation of his house. Give papa and Hornby a hint on this subject.

"You will be glad to hear that I have the most delicious little boudoir imaginable, where I am writing this letter, and where I can converse freely with Léontine, who is really indispensable to me. You know how indulgent I am to darling Bootle, but I won't allow him to smoke in my boudoir, so he rarely troubles me, and his mother never troubles me at all. Tell Hornby we have a famous billiard-room, and a regular smoking divan. He can hunt four or five times a week with the Cheshire fox-hounds, if he is so inclined.

"Since our arrival has been made known in the neighbourhood we have had lots of morning visi-

tors. Everybody, who is anybody, I believe, has called upon us. As we have had to return all these calls, our time has been fully occupied, and we have naturally seen a great many houses and a great many people. I like best the Huncoats of Coldcoats, and I expect Hornby to fall in love with Milicent Huncoat, the youngest daughter, who is uncommonly pretty and lively. The Booth Bacopes of Hawbrook Hall, the Oswaldtwistles of Chaidley, the Accringtons, the Briercliffes, and the Walmsleys, are also nice people. But you will soon see them, and judge for yourself. All our friends are wealthy, have got large houses, and live in very good style. We have dined with the Huncoats and Oswaldtwistles, and have had very sumptuous entertainments. Almost every day we have a little dinner-party at home. Mr. Shelmerdine, I believe, is rarely without company.

"I flatter myself that I have caused a sensation. Nothing like my toilettes, I am sure, have been

seen in these parts, and I can make myself agreeable, if I like, to men. Women are so jealous of each other, that they won't admire you if you are at all out of the common run. Some antiquated dames, and a few not quite so antiquated, I can see, think me too fast, but their better halves and sons don't share the opinion. Milicent Huncoat, who is the prettiest girl I have seen here, has taken to me amazingly.

"And now, dearest mamma, I am about to astonish you. Yesterday we all drove over to Manchester in the barouche. Mrs. Shelmerdine had some shopping to do in St. Ann's-square, so we drove there at once and set her down. Bootle and I were left in the carriage, amusing ourselves by quizzing the natives, when who should come up but Captain Musgrave. There! are you not astonished? Yes, it was Musgrave himself, and looking particularly handsome. Wasn't it droll? He was sauntering along listlessly, but the moment

he beheld your pretty little daughter in her French chapeau and redingote, he sprang towards the carriage. Recollecting the scene that had occurred at the Acacias, I felt rather uneasy, not knowing how Bootle might take it, but the darling boy behaved charmingly, as you shall hear.

"'Ah, Captain Musgrave, is it really you?' I cried, as he came up and shook hands, bowing at the same time to Bootle. 'Who would have thought of seeing you in Manchester!'

"'It is an unlikely place to see me at,' he rejoined, laughing. 'But I have some friends in the 40th Dragoons, who are quartered here, and I have been spending a day or two with them. I should have been equally surprised to see you, had I not heard that you are at Belfield. I intended to do myself the pleasure of calling on you to offer my felicitations. Pray accept them now.'

"He then addressed Bootle, whose placid looks showed him it was all right, and said:

"'For the last fortnight I have been staying at Peovor Hall, in Cheshire, with your uncle, Mr. Egerton Bootle, and an awfully jolly time I have had of it—good hunting, good shooting, good society, good living, good everything.'

"'Bravo!' exclaimed Bootle. "Peovor is a capital house to stay at. Madame has not yet made her uncle's acquaintance. That's a pleasure to come—eh, Tiff?'

"'Does he resemble his sister?' I whispered.

"'Rather,' replied my husband.

"Captain Musgrave guessed what I had said, even if he didn't overhear the remark, for he immediately gave me a very amusing picture of the old gentleman, which made us both laugh immoderately. We were in the very midst of our merriment, when Mrs. Shelmerdine, whom I had quite forgotten, came out of the shop. Captain

Musgrave must be a striking-looking person, for she immediately recognised him, though she had only seen him once before for a few minutes, as you know, at the Acacias. Never shall I forget her look of surprise. It was truly comical. Not in the least abashed, Musgrave made her a most respectful bow, and Bootle hastened to inform her that the captain had been staying with her brother at Peovor. This altered matters in a moment. Musgrave, you may be quite sure, saw the right line to take, and his praises of Mr. Egerton Bootle, and enumeration of the county people whom he had met at Peovor, acted like the softest of sawder. Mrs. Shelmerdine thawed at once. Didn't raise the slightest objection when Bootle asked the captain to come and spend a few days at Belfield, but graciously added, as he assisted her into the carriage, that she should be very glad to see him. So it was settled that he should come

next day, and come he did. Indeed, he is here now.

"But I have not quite done with Manchester. Just as we were about to drive off, and Musgrave was bidding us adieu, two of the officers of the 40th came up. These were Major Fullarton and Captain Frere, both beaux garçons, as you will own, for you will see them at the dinner and ball, and Musgrave's particular friends. The carriage was instantly stopped. Presentations and a vast deal of babillage took place, in the course of which many pretty things were said to me by the officers; the result being that Bootle was invited by Major Fullarton to dine that day at the barracks at Hulme, or some such place. The major apologised for taking my husband away, but I said I could spare him, and the dear boy accepted the invitation. This is the first time he has dined out alone, but I am not sorry that I let him go; for though, by his own account, he got rather screwed,

he became better acquainted with Musgrave, who, of course, formed one of the party. He slept at the Queen's Hotel in Manchester that night, and came over next morning with the captain.

"You won't wonder that Musgrave has made his way rapidly at Belfield, when I tell you that he pays the most deferential attention to the old lady, and has quite succeeded in gaining her good graces. Mr. Shelmerdine was rather surprised when he learnt that Bootle had invited the captain to the house; but he made no objection, though I heard him mutter that his son was a fool. I dare say Musgrave would like to flirt with me, if I would allow him, but I won't. Quite right, I know you will say. Darling Bootle and the captain are the best friends possible.

"As I naturally feel some curiosity about poor Mrs. Musgrave, I have questioned the captain about her, but can learn very little from him. Whatever her faults may have been, and I fear

she must have had great faults, she is much to be pitied. How beautiful we used to think her! There is something very strange in their sudden separation that I never can make out, and Musgrave declines to enlighten me on the subject. To say the least, the poor lady must have been excessively foolish. The worst feature in the case, it appears to me, and the circumstance that tells most against her, is that she has not returned to her family, but is living somewhere in absolute retirement. I am sure papa knows the whole truth of the story, if he would only tell it. But he is so very close. Can't you get it out of him? I don't know why I take so much interest in the matter, except that I should like to know positively whether she was to blame, or Musgrave. This, at least, you can ascertain for me. You will naturally ask, what does this signify to me? Not much; but I am curious.

"Having full permission to ask whom I please

to Belfield, I have exercised my privilege in favour of Eva Bracebridge, and have invited her to stay with me. I think she will come, though she has only accepted the invitation conditionally. I like her, though we differ on so many points, and I want her to see how well I am married. I am sure she will be impressed by Belfield. She is still residing at Hylton Park—Sir Norman Hylton's place—and, as she could not reside there alone, her aunt, Mrs. Daventry, performs the part of gouvernante, and takes care of her. She said she didn't like leaving her aunt, so I have begged her to bring the duenna with her. It will be good fun if they come. Her guardian, Mr. Myddleton Pomfret, who was thrown from his horse and much injured, has quite recovered, and has gone to Madras. I am sure she had a secret tendresse for him, but he didn't appear to return it. My belief is that she will marry Sir Norman. She can scarcely do less than give him her hand

after taking possession of his house. I hear he is still a suitor, though he has been twice refused. The third time will pay for all. She cannot do better, for he is exceedingly handsome, gentleman-like, and agreeable. He is a great friend of Major Fullarton, who, as well as Captain Frere, dined with us yesterday, and the major talked to me a great deal about him. He says that Sir Norman was quite au désespoir when Eva left the Beau-Rivage, but his hopes were unexpectedly revived during a morning call which he made, contrary to his convention with mademoiselle, at Hylton Park. Eva permitted him to become her suitor, but would not give any promise of ultimate acceptance—took him on trial, in fact.

"Major Fullarton was staying at Lord Huntercombe's, where Sir Norman was a guest at the time, and heard all about it. Things still remain precisely in the same state. Eva won't be hurried into a decision, and Sir Norman dares not be

too urgent, for fear of dismissal. The major hears frequently from his friend, who has taken up his quarters at a small place in the neighbourhood of his own castle. I have such a strong sympathy for a despairing lover, that if Eva decides upon coming to me, I shall get Bootle to invite Sir Norman at the same time.

"There is one little obstacle in the way of this, and that is Captain Musgrave. But perhaps he may be gone before the others arrive.

"What a long letter I have written. I am afraid you will never have patience to read it. But I have entered into these details to make you au fait with everything before your arrival here.

"I don't know what papa will say about Captain Musgrave being here, but you must keep him quiet. Hornby, I know, will be delighted. Tell him he will be able to get up a rubber, but the governor won't stand lansquenet or écarté. Mus-

grave and Bootle spend half the day in the billiard room. They are there now.

"But I must bring this interminable letter to a close.

"With dearest love to papa, Hornby, and yourself,

"Believe me,

"Your very affectionate daughter,

"THEOPHANIA SHELMERDINE.

"P.S.—Darling Bootle and Musgrave have just entered my boudoir, but their habiliments exhaled such a powerful odour of tubac, that I turned them out, after sprinkling them liberally with eau-de-Cologne. Musgrave descried my voluminous despatch to you, and wanted to read it. Of course I wouldn't let him. Dearest B. desires to be remembered to you all."

In acknowledging her daughter's letter, which

she did very promptly, Mrs. Flaxyard expressed the great gratification it would afford them all to visit her at her new home, where they were rejoiced to learn she was so happy, and to take part in the proposed festivities. She also expressed her satisfaction at the good understanding that subsisted between her daughter and Mrs. Shelmerdine, to whom she begged the united kind regards of herself and her family.

But she made no allusion to Captain Musgrave, and concluded a rather brief letter—singularly brief and guarded, in comparison with the letter she had received—by saying that she had already begun to make preparations for the anticipated pleasurable visit.

VI.

IN THE BILLIARD-ROOM.

BOOTLE and Musgrave had been playing billiards all morning, as was their wont, Emile, who could play a first-rate game himself if he had the chance, acting as marker, when Bootle, who had won two games running, and who was, consequently, in excellent spirits, declared that he must go and have a look at his wife, and, throwing his cigar into the fire, left Musgrave alone with the valet.

For a few minutes after his departure Mus-

grave continued knocking the balls about for his own amusement, making some wonderful strokes, and showing Emile, who was looking on in admiration, what he could do.

"Monsieur le Capitaine plays superbly," observed the valet. "He can do what he likes with the balls."

"Your master plays better than I do, Emile," rejoined Musgrave, with a peculiar smile. "He has beaten me twice this morning. In fact, as you know, he generally beats me."

"There may be a reason for that," said Emile. "But if I am not mistaken, M. le Capitaine could give him thirty, and still win."

"You think so, Emile?"

"If I were in a position to do so, I should like to make a bet upon it, provided monsieur would engage not to give away the game."

"You are a sharp fellow, Emile," cried Musgrave, laughing, and going on with his play.

"Billiards is not the only game at which M. le Capitaine is habile; but he cannot hide his play from me. I am quicksighted, but other people are quick-sighted too, and I would recommend extreme caution. Monsieur will excuse me. It is in his interest that I venture to offer this advice. There are people capable of opening my master's eyes."

"But you are not one of them, I am sure, Emile," said Musgrave, leaning upon his cue, and regarding him steadfastly.

"Moi! M. le Capitaine!—I despise such cowardly infamy. I would never betray a gentleman who inadvertently placed himself in my power, but trust entirely to his generosity. I might make more, perhaps, by a contrary line of conduct, but that would not suit me. Je puis me rendre très utile, monsieur"

"Ou bien dangereux, n'est ce pas, mon ami?" remarked Musgrave.

"Monsieur has said it," rejoined Emile, bowing.

"Well, then, you may count upon my generosity, Emile."

"Monsieur has adopted the wisest course, and may perfectly rely upon my zeal and fidelity," said Emile, placing his hand on his heart. "I am not to be bought at any price. But it will be necessary to secure Léontine, whose suspicions are already awakened. A French femme de chambre is endowed with wonderful acuteness, and can detect an affair of this sort in a moment. But if acute, Léontine is also loyal, and would scorn to betray her mistress. The very first day that M. le Capitaine arrived at Belfield, she observed to me, 'Je vois bien que ce beau monsieur est l'amant de madame.' "

"Votre Léontine a joliment menti," rejoined Musgrave.

"No doubt she was too free with her tongue;

but as she only made the remark to me, it did not much signify. I will answer for her, if——"

"I make it worth her while to be silent. Well, her mouth must be stopped, Emile. Here is wherewithal to do it," he added, taking out his purse, and giving him all the gold it contained.

Emile quickly pocketed the shiners.

"Henceforth Léontine and myself are entirely devoted to monsieur. A little message or a billet can be securely delivered at any time. Ah! voici monsieur et madame."

Flying to open the folding-door, he admitted Bootle and his wife, and withdrew.

Mrs. Bootle, who was fresh from the hands of Léontine, and charmingly dressed as usual, looked in such good spirits that Musgrave could not help asking the cause.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Bootle. "She has just had a letter from her dearest mamma, to say they will all be here to-day."

Isn't that delightful?" cried the young lady.

Musgrave didn't think it delightful, but he tried to look pleased, and said what was proper to the occasion.

"Who else do you think is coming?" said Mrs. Bootle.

"Haven't the least idea."

"Guess. No, you'll never guess, so I'll tell you. Eva Bracebridge."

"Eva Bracebridge!" exclaimed Musgrave, in astonishment. "May I inquire when you expect her?"

"On the 9th—the day before the ball. She is bringing her aunt, Mrs. Daventry, with her. I suppose you know that Sir Norman Hylton is renewing his suit?"

"Yes, I heard so from Fullarton, who corresponds with him. I hope he will be refused for the third time."

"What a shocking wish! You ought to con-

quer your dislike to him. I must make you friends."

"I don't think that very probable, after our meeting at Evian."

"That's the very reason why you ought to be friends. I must bring it about. Bootle is going to invite him here at the same time as Eva. I hope to have them both at the ball."

Musgrave's brow darkened.

"I am afraid I shall not have the pleasure of appearing at the ball," he said.

"Nonsense!" she cried. "I won't hear of your departure." Then, turning to Bootle, she added, "Do go and write the invitation to Sir Norman, dearest boy, and I'll enclose it in my letter to Eva."

"I wish you wouldn't send the invitation," remarked Musgrave. "Sir Norman won't like to find me here. It will be a bore to both of us—but to me especially."

"Sorry for that, but I must adhere to my arrangement."

"Don't you see, she has got some scheme in her head?" observed Bootle. "When that's the case, the little woman always will have her own way."

"Never mind my scheme, but go and write the note—there's a dear boy."

So Bootle left the room.

"You look displeased," she said to Musgrave, as soon as they were alone.

"I may well look so," she rejoined, moodily. "You seem to have taken every step to make my stay here impossible. To-day your family arrive, and I feel almost certain Mr. Flaxyard will object to my presence. This perhaps was unavoidable, though I wish their visit could have been postponed; but you have gone out of the way to invite Eva and Sir Norman, and I shall be compelled to leave the house before they come."

"No. I won't allow you to go," she rejoined. "I see no difficulty whatever in the matter."

"Well, I will remain if you desire it—coûte que coûte. You have now such absolute power over me, that I must obey all your behests. I begin to wish that I had never come here at all."

"Why so?" she cried. "You told me yesterday you had never been so happy as now."

"I told you the truth. But to-day I am wretched. All my dreams are dispersed — all my hopes crushed by what you have just told me."

"You ought not to indulge any such hopes, and I am very glad they are crushed."

"You are a heartless coquette. You give me encouragement for the mere pleasure of disappointing me."

"Call me what names you please, but I forbid you positively to make love to me any more. You see how fond darling Bootle is of me."

"He does not love you half so well as I do!" cried Musgrave, passionately.

"I know better. I don't mind a little innocent flirtation, but I cannot allow any serious love-making."

And she prepared to leave the room.

"You cannot be insensible to a passion like mine," cried Musgrave, detaining her. "You must listen to me."

"Release me instantly," she cried. "I won't listen to a word more."

Musgrave still retained her hand, when the door opened, and Emile entered. The discreet valet, however, appeared to see nothing.

"Monsieur would like to speak to madame for a moment in the library," said Emile, without raising his eyes.

"Say I will come to him instantly," she replied.

And the valet departed.

"You have compromised me with that man,"

she said, in a reproachful voice. "What must he think of me?"

"Heed not what he thinks," replied Musgrave. "He is perfectly safe. Forgive me if I have offended you."

"Only on the assurance that you never presume to address me in this strain again," she rejoined.

"You are without pity," he cried.

"Entirely so," she rejoined. "You will find it in vain to move me, so I would recommend you not to make any further attempt."

Musgrave uttered an ejaculation of despair. But he laughed aloud as the door closed upon her.

"I shall win the game yet," he mentally exclaimed, as he took up a cue and returned to the billiard-table.

VII.

MRS. BOOTLE'S BOUDOIR.

On the afternoon of the same day the Flax-yards arrived at Bury, and were met at the station by the young people. Mrs. Bootle took charge of papa and mamma and the lady's-maid; Bootle conveyed Hornby in his brougham; and the luggage was sent up to Belfield in the van.

It would be useless to describe the raptures of the elderly folk as they approached the mansion Mr. Shelmerdine was waiting for them on the terrace with Captain Musgrave, and greeted them

most cordially. A disagreeable ordeal had to be gone through within doors, but it was got over better than might have been expected, and without any of the unpleasantness that attended Mrs. Bootle's entrance into the mansion.

Luncheon was ready for the new comers, but they declined it. Contenting themselves with a glass of sherry, which was pressed upon them by their host, the two gentlemen went out to take a survey of the premises, and visited the gardens, the hot-houses, and the stables. Old Flaxyard thought everything perfect. Hornby, who was not a bad judge, declared that he never saw finer horses than those exhibited to him. Both father and son took care to praise the view, though they could not see it very distinctly, but the factories, being already lighted up, produced rather a brilliant effect.

While the gentlemen were thus employed, Mrs. Bootle showed her mamma over a portion of the

house, with which the elderly lady was enchanted, and then took her to the boudoir, that they might have a quiet chat together.

"Well, mamma!" cried the younger lady, laughing, "who was right—you or I? Here you all are at Belfield. Own that you have got a very clever little daughter."

"Yes, I do own it," said Mrs. Flaxyard, kissing her affectionately. "I am delighted to see you in this charming mansion. My only anxiety is that you should maintain your position."

"Maintain it, mamma! No fear of that. You will soon find out what a favourite I am with Mr. Shelmerdine. Besides, I have managed to put down all opposition."

"Not quite, I fear. I did not trust myself to write on the subject—especially as we were to meet so soon—but I was excessively sorry to find Captain Musgrave installed in the house. He is very agreeable, I own—very fascinating—but I know

something of his character, and he is not the sort of person who ought to be here. On no account, my dear child, must you get talked about; and talked about you will be, depend upon it, if he remains here long."

"You alarm yourself very unnecessarily, dearest mamma. As far as I am concerned, I have no desire that Captain Musgrave should remain an hour longer; but I can't exactly turn him out. As I explained to you in my letter, he was invited by Bootle, not by me."

"Excuse a mother's uneasiness, my love. You are so delightfully circumstanced, and have obtained such an enviable position, that I wouldn't for the world you should forfeit it by an indiscretion. Not that I fear anything wrong—don't misunderstand me for a moment — but the world is very censorious. Captain Musgrave is notoriously a mauvais sujet — you are very pretty and very

lively—and his attentions to you are certain to be commented on."

"But, dearest mamma, he pays me no attention—as you will find."

"That only convinces me he has a dangerous design. His attentions to Mrs. Shelmerdine—his attentions to Bootle—are part of a fixed plan. However he may seek to disguise it, you are his real mark. Belfield would have very little attraction for Captain Musgrave without you, my dear."

"I don't at all agree with you, mamma; but if you think it necessary, I can easily give him a hint to go. But please let him stay over the ball. I hope you admire my boudoir," she added, in order to change the subject. "Isn't it pretty? There is such a delightful look out into the garden."

"So I see," replied Mrs. Flaxyard, rising, and advancing to the window.

Just at this moment, Léontine entered. Not perceiving Mrs. Flaxyard, who was concealed from her by the window-curtain, she exclaimed:

"Un billet pour madame de la part de M. le Capitaine."

"From whom?" cried Mrs. Flaxyard, coming back quickly. "From the captain, did you say, Léontine?"

"I said so, madame," rejoined the soubrette, made aware of her indiscretion, and eager to repair it, "but I know nothing about it. The billet was given me by Emile. Most likely he was mistaken. He is very stupid."

"The note is not for me, but for Mrs. Shelmerdine," said Mrs. Bootle, with perfect composure. "Most likely an answer to an invitation. Take it to her at once, Léontine. I hope Emile will make no more such mistakes."

Mrs. Flaxyard was on the point of asking to see the note, but the soubrette darted off instantly.

"This is a matter of frequent occurrence," pursued Mrs. Bootle. "Mrs. Shelmerdine's letters are constantly brought to me. But it is strange the mistake should occur just at the time we were speaking of Captain Musgrave."

"Almost too strange to be credible," rejoined Mrs. Flaxyard, who looked by no means satisfied. "You are sure you are not deceiving your mother, darling?"

"Why these unjust suspicions, dearest mamma? Have I ever deceived you?"

"I hope not. But I am more than ever anxious about you now, because I know that the slightest error would be irretrievable. The explanation you have given seems perfectly natural, but Léontine's manner was extremely suspicious. I am sorry you brought those French servants with you. I don't like either of them."

"Why, mamma, you are a great deal more nonsensical than Mrs. Shelmerdine. You seem to

forget that I am married. If you take me to task in this way, I shall never let you into my boudoir again. Nobody is allowed to scold me here."

"I wish you would never let Léontine enter your boudoir, my love," rejoined Mrs. Flaxyard. "But I hear your papa's voice outside. I must go to him."

"Not a word about Captain Musgrave, please, mamma."

"Don't be afraid," rejoined Mrs. Flaxyard, as she went out.

VIII.

THE DINNER.

THE grand dinner took place next day.

A little before eight, which was the hour appointed, the guests began to arrive, and were received in the drawing-room by Mrs. Shelmerdine, and Mrs. Bootle, who was exquisitely dressed, and looked remarkably well, was stationed a little behind her. Presentations next took place to the Flaxyard family. The party was large — above thirty. There were Colonel Lancefield of the 40th Dragoons, Major Fullarton, and two other

officers; several wealthy manufacturers, Mr. and Mrs. Booth Bacope, Mr. Thornley Bacope, and the Misses Bacope; Mr. and Mrs. Oswaldtwistle; Mr. and Mrs. Huncoat, Miss Huncoat, and Miss Milicent Huncoat; the Rev. Mr. Rasbotham and Mrs. Rasbotham; Dr. and Mrs. Molyneux of Bury; the Accringtons, the Orrells, the Briercliffes, and several others. Some of the persons we have enumerated occupied large houses in the neighbourhood, and others came from a distance. Colonel Lancefield and the officers drove over from Manchester, as did the Orrells. For the most part, the younger ladies were extremely pretty, and very well dressed, though their toilettes could not vie with Mrs. Bootle's.

All the guests having arrived with commendable punctuality, the gong sounded, and Mr. Knowles announced the important and agreeable fact that dinner was served; whereupon Mr. Shelmerdine offered his arm to Mrs. Flaxyard, and led her

through the hall, which was lined with servants, to the dining-room. They were followed by the company, Mrs. Shelmerdine being brought in by Colonel Lancefield, and Mrs. Bootle by Major Fullarton. Mr. Flaxyard had to take charge of Mrs. Bacope, and Bootle escorted Mrs. Oswaldtwistle. As a matter of course, the fair Milicent was assigned to Hornby, his sister having specially introduced him to her friend.

The repast was served à la Russe, the table being ornamented with corbeilles of the choicest fruits and flowers, all of which came from Mr. Shelmerdine's hot-houses and conservatories.

The dinner was admirable, and impressed all who partook of it—all, at least, who understood what a good French dinner ought to be—with the skill of Mr. Shelmerdine's chef. Colonel Lancefield, who was something of a gourmand, told Mrs. Shelmerdine that he had never eaten so good a dinner—even at St. Petersburg.

Having seen the menu, we are able to state that there was a tortue claire à l'Anglaise as well as a potage à l'Impératrice, a superb turbot, sauce Hollandaise, rougets grillés, lamproies de Bordeaux, a dinde truffée from Strasbourg, a jambon de Montanches glacé, a quartier de chevreuil, sauce poivrade, a gigot de mouton braisée, a pâté chaud à l'Allemande, a timballe à la Toulonnaise, bécasses bardées, bavaroises, soufflets, compotes, gelées, glaces, and a hundred other good things. The wines were Rœderer and Clicquot, in the way of champagne, Rudesheimer and cabinet Johannisberg, Xerez au retour de l'Inde, incomparable Serchial Madeira, with Bordeaux, for those who preferred it. After quaffing a few glasses of the cabinet Johannisberg, which suited him exactly, Mr. Flaxyard felt supremely happy, and regarded his pretty daughter with an air of great contentment.

Some people assert that less wine is drunk

now-a-days than formerly. No doubt very little, comparatively speaking, is drunk after dinner, but during the repast, if the wine be as excellent as our friend Mr. Shelmerdine's, a good deal, we venture to say, will be drunk.

On the present occasion there was a tolerable consumption of hock and champagne, to say nothing of sherry and Madeira, and Mr. Knowles, the best and most intelligent of butlers, kept the glasses constantly filled. The effect of these agreeable wines was soon manifested by the increased animation of the company, and a great deal of lively conversation ensued.

But neither Clicquot nor Johannisberg seemed to have much effect upon Musgrave, for though he drank freely enough, his spirits did not rise in proportion, and he sadly neglected Miss Bacope, next whom he sat.

Could he be jealous of the smiles bestowed by Mrs. Bootle upon the handsome Major Fullarton?

Hornby, as his sister anticipated, was charmed by the bright eyes and blooming cheeks of Milicent Huncoat, and began to debate with himself whether it would not be advisable to take a wife out of Lancashire, and he resolved to make some inquiries of his sister as to the fair girl's expectations. Meantime, he gave her several amorous mottoes, culled from bonbons.

A large dinner, such as we have described, takes some time to get through, and before the ladies had retired, the guests invited to the musical soirée had begun to arrive, and consequently the gentlemen were not allowed to sit long over their wine. The spacious saloon being now brilliantly lighted up and filled with company, presented a very gay appearance. Several of the girls played and sang remarkably well, so that the musical part of the entertainment was a decided success. Mrs. Bootle, of course, took a prominent part at the piano, and was much admired. After the concert there was a

little dancing. Mrs. Bootle valsed with Major Fullarton and Captain Frere, but she would not dance with Musgrave. By this time Hornby's head was completely turned by Milicent Huncoat, who valsed delightfully, and he was on the very verge of proposing. Before committing the rash act, he resolved to consult Bootle, but he found him engaged in a rubber with Musgrave, Mr. Oswaldtwistle, and Mr. Huncoat. Precisely at midnight supper was served, and a great deal more champagne was drunk. This concluded the entertainment. There was no more dancing, and immediately after supper the guests prepared to depart —prepared, we say, for they did not get away quite so soon as they expected.

Mr. Knowles brewed the strongest ale in the neighbourhood—a fact well known to the butler's intimates. This being a particular occasion, all the footmen were regaled in the servants'-hall, and many a foaming glass of bright October was

drained to the health of the young couple. Nor did Mr. Knowles forget his friends outside, but sent a liberal supply to the coachmen — far too liberal, indeed, for the potent ale got into their heads. Before the hour of departure arrived, there was scarcely one among the set, footman or coachman, who was not powerfully refreshed. The first carriage called up was Mr. Booth Bacope's; but Mr. Oswaldtwistle's coachman being nearest the steps, refused to move on, whereupon Bacope, without the slightest hesitation, drove right across the lawn, with the intention of taking up at the farther flight of steps. But his design was frustrated by the surly Oswaldtwistle, who, just touching his horses, blocked up this entrance, and all the long line of carriages in the rear moved on, in the midst of a tremendous roar of laughter from the various half-intoxicated footmen gathered round the steps. All laughed except one, and this was Mr. Bacope's footman, who immediately endea-

voured to remove the obnoxious Oswaldtwistle. While he was engaged in this attempt, the whip descended upon his head and shoulders, and the porch, in which stood Mr. Booth Bacope with his wife and daughters and three or four young men, resounded with furious imprecations. Twenty footmen at least, all shouting and swearing, rushed to the scene of action, and a battle royal seemed imminent. But though menaced on all sides, and though his horses kicked and plunged, the dogged Oswaldtwistle would not move on.

While this took place outside, the entrance-hall was filled with young ladies, with their mammas, all enveloped in very pretty hooded mantles and cloaks, prepared for their departure. With them were Major Fullarton, Captain Frere, Musgrave, Hornby, and others, talking and laughing, when the noise reaching their ears, most of these young fellows rushed out to ascertain the cause of the row, and being amused by the dis-

turbance among the flunkies, encouraged it by their laughter. Presently, Mr. Oswaldtwistle, having been summoned by Knowles, ordered his coachman authoritatively to move on; but even thus enjoined, the obstinate fellow refused. His master then directed the footman to take his place, but on hearing this command, the coachman lashed his horses, and scattering the flunkies on either side, drove furiously across the lawn, calling out, with an oath, that his master might get home how he could. However, he was eventually stopped at the lodge gates, and compelled to come back.

A fresh scene of confusion followed this contumacious act. Other coachmen at once started out of the line, and tearing across the lawn, which seemed destined to be cut to pieces that night, strove to get into his place, while the others, shouting and swearing, filled up just as quickly behind. Collisions took place in consequence, and

lamps were smashed. Half a dozen coachmen were discharged by their masters on the spot, but, like the first mutineer, they refused to give up the reins, and the ladies, naturally much alarmed, hesitated to enter their carriages. For a few minutes the storm raged with unabated fury—the coachmen continuing to swear and cut at each other with their whips; but eventually, by the combined efforts of Mr. Shelmerdine and Knowles, three or four carriages were got off, and then the rest went away more quietly.

IX.

MATERNAL ANXIETIES.

OLD FLAXYARD and his son enjoyed their visit to Belfield immensely. Almost every day there was a dinner-party on a grand scale at some large house in the neighbourhood. What with hunting with the Cheshire fox-hounds, and flirting with Milicent Huncoat, whom he met at every house where he dined, Hornby passed his time very agreeably. Not less happy was old Flaxyard. He liked good dinners, and never had his tastes been more thoroughly gratified than they

now were. What struck the jolly old boy with astonishment was, that everybody seemed to have an extraordinarily fine cellar of port. Having made this remarkable discovery, he drank a good deal, and the wine must certainly have been very good, since he seemed none the worse for it. John always took charge of him in the morning, and the old gentleman was quite content to sit down in the counting-house, or to take part in any conversation on business. Occasionally they went over by train to Manchester, and passed an hour or two on 'Change, and then had luncheon at the club of which Mr. Shelmerdine was a member. Brought thus closely together, and having abundant opportunities of exchanging their ideas, the two old gentlemen, who had always entertained a strong regard for each other, became fast friends. There were many points of resemblance between them, both being shrewd, sensible, warm-hearted men. On all occasions John spoke with the greatest affec-

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now were. What struck the jolly old boy with astonishment was, that everybody seemed to have an extraordinarily fine cellar of port. Having made this remarkable discovery, he drank a good deal, and the wine must certainly have been very good, since he seemed none the worse for it. John always took charge of him in the morning, and the old gentleman was quite content to sit down in the counting-house, or to take part in any conversation on business. Occasionally they went over by train to Manchester, and passed an hour or two on 'Change, and then had luncheon at the club of which Mr. Shelmerdine was a member. Brought thus closely together, and having abundant opportunities of exchanging their ideas, the two old gentlemen, who had always entertained a strong regard for each other, became fast friends. There were many points of resemblance between them, both being shrewd, sensible, warm-hearted men. On all occasions John spoke with the greatest affec-

tion of his daughter-in-law, who, it was evident, had quite won his heart. He had not a single fault to find with her, and his commendations brought tears into old Flaxyard's eyes.

The anxiety which Mrs. Flaxyard felt about her daughter somewhat damped the pleasure of her visit. Feeling how much was at stake, she exercised the utmost vigilance over Mrs. Bootle, and took care that she should never be alone with Musgrave. That cautious personage paid Mrs. Bootle very little attention, but the vigilant mother was not to be duped by this mode of proceeding. When they sat apart, she had often surprised a glance of intelligence between them, and she could not be blind to the jealousy exhibited by the captain at the encouragement given to the handsome Major Fullarton. Though Mrs. Flaxyard had never succeeded in detecting anything further, she felt almost certain that communications passed between her daughter and Musgrave through the

medium of Léontine. Had she dared to do so, she would have insisted upon the immediate dismissal of the artful soubrette; but she feared that some esclandre might ensue. Bootle was the most unconcerned of the whole party. Not a suspicion seemed to enter his head.

But the ball was at hand, and fresh guests were expected. Eva and her aunt were certainly coming; but no answer had as yet been received from Sir Norman.

One morning, Mrs. Bootle and her mamma were again closeted together in the boudoir, when Bootle burst in upon them with a letter in his hand. He had likewise a cigar in his mouth, but it was immediately taken out and tossed into the fire by his wife's orders.

"Here's a letter from Sir Norman!" he cried. "He's coming. I thought he would."

"I'm very glad of it," responded madame. "Have you told Captain Musgrave about it?"

"I showed him the letter. He means to leave us to-day. He won't meet Sir Norman. I'm deuced sorry that he should be driven away. Perhaps you can persuade him to stay, Tiff? Try."

"I have tried, darling boy, but without success," she rejoined. "I think he'll come back to us when Sir Norman leaves."

"I wish you hadn't made me invite that young baronet. He will be a confounded bore."

"Sir Norman is exceedingly gentleman-like and agreeable, and will give éclat to the ball," remarked Mrs. Flaxyard. "Pray when does Captain Musgrave leave?"

"Not till after dinner," replied Bootle. "He means to remain for a few days in Manchester."

"In Manchester!" exclaimed Mrs. Flaxyard. "Why not go back to town at once?"

"I'm sure I can't say. You had better put that question to him yourself, ma'am."

"I think I shall," said Mrs. Flaxyard.

"Why on earth should you interfere with Captain Musgrave's movements?" cried Bootle. "What can it possibly matter to you if he does stay in Manchester?"

Mrs. Flaxyard was about to make an angry reply, but she checked herself.

"Well, I must go back to him," said Bootle. "I left him with Hornby in the billiard-room. We shall drive out after luncheon."

No sooner did the door close on him than Mrs. Flaxyard said to her daughter, in a serious tone,

"My dear, Captain Musgrave must *not* remain in Manchester, and I am really surprised he should think of doing so. People will wonder why he has left so suddenly—why he is not at the ball—and why he is staying in the neighbourhood. All the officers are coming from Manchester. Some sort of explanation must be given them."

"Major Fullarton will give all the explanation

that may be requisite to his brother-officers, mamma."

"Well, I am rejoiced that Captain Musgrave is going. But we must get rid of him effectually. Either you or I must give him clearly to understand that he can never enter this house again, and that it will be useless, therefore, to remain in the neighbourhood. The last thing I desire to do is to warn Bootle—but I *will* warn him, if necessary."

Mrs. Bootle at first looked angry, but she now became excessively pale.

"I will do exactly what you tell me," she said, with a quivering lip. "He shall never return—never!"

"You are a dear, good child!"

"You have judged me shamefully, mamma—shamefully!—but I shall not attempt to defend myself."

"My darling, I don't judge you at all. I am

merely trying to protect you from the designs of a roué. Your papa will be as much rejoiced as I am that you have done with Musgrave for ever, for he has been a source of great anxiety to both of us."

"Don't say any more," cried her daughter, pushing her from her. "I will do as you wish. Leave me to myself."

Mrs. Flaxyard quitted the boudoir, and went to her own room, which was not far off. She left the door ajar, and remained on the watch.

Shortly afterwards a bell rang, and Léontine was seen tripping towards the boudoir.

X.

IN THE CONSERVATORY.

THE soubrette did not remain long with her mistress, but, on coming out of the boudoir, hurried away. Feeling convinced that she was charged with a message to Captain Musgrave, Mrs. Flaxyard waited the result. Léontine, however, did not reappear, but after the lapse of a few more minutes, during which the anxious mother did not quit her post of observation, Mrs. Bootle issued from the boudoir, and went down-stairs. Presently Mrs. Shelmerdine followed her. On reach-

ing the entrance-hall she encountered Knowles, and asked him if her daughter was in the drawing-room. The butler replied that his young mistress had gone to the conservatory; whereupon Mrs. Flaxyard hastened in that direction.

We will precede her.

The conservatory, which was full of the choicest plants, opened out from the morning-room, and of course had an entrance from the garden. As Mrs. Bootle went in, Captain Musgrave, who was walking by himself outside, caught sight of her through the glass, and immediately joined her. Her looks showed that she was agitated and uneasy.

"Emile has just delivered the message which you sent me through Léontine," he said. "You want to speak to me. What is the matter? Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"I have just gone through a very painful scene with mamma."

"About me, I suppose? Well, I am going away. Won't that content her?"

"She insists that you shall not return. You must not remain in the neighbourhood. I promised her that I would give you an absolute dismissal."

"Quite right," rejoined Musgrave, laughing. "Make any promise she may require. As to keeping it—that's another question."

"I shall keep my promise. I don't mean to see you any more—neither will I receive any more messages from you, nor any more billets. When you leave this house to-day, we part for ever, and must henceforward be strangers. Mamma has convinced me that my reputation is in danger. I have been very silly and thoughtless, but you have presumed a great deal too much on my amiability. You don't believe that I love my husband——"

"I can't believe it," he interrupted. "I think it utterly impossible that any woman, constituted

like yourself, can love such a person. He is incapable of inspiring a great passion in a breast like yours. But I cannot obey your injunctions. I cannot—will not be thus dismissed. I will consent to anything you propose, but not to utter dismissal. As well condemn me to death at once—better, indeed. I will wait patiently till your family have left—till Sir Norman and Eva Bracebridge are gone—but then you must recal me."

"I dare not recal you, even if I would. Mamma declares that if you ever enter this house again she will warn Bootle."

"An idle threat. Not worth thinking about. She is far too fond of you to do anything of the sort. Don't be in the least afraid of her."

"I am not afraid. I don't think she would execute her threat. But she has completely opened my eyes to the danger to which I have exposed myself. You have built hopes on an entirely baseless foundation."

"Then you have been merely trifling with me all this time?" he cried, bitterly. "I said you were a heartless coquette. But I will not be cast off thus. You have gone too far to retreat. You have more reason to be afraid of me than of your mother."

"Ah, you threaten! Now I see what a fearful risk I have run. But don't fancy for a moment that I am in your power."

"You forget that you have sent me notes that might be misconstrued. But forgive me. I know not what I say. I would not injure you for the world. You are dearer to me than life itself." Then, perceiving by her looks that his passionate language had made a certain impression upon her, he added, "I know you are not happy here. Fly with me. My existence shall be devoted to you."

"You have said this to a dozen others. No persuasion shall induce me to leave my husband."

At this moment voices and laughter were heard outside in the garden.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "Bootle is coming here with my brother."

"They must not find me," cried Musgrave.

And he flew to the door communicating with the morning-room. But his exit was stayed by Mrs. Flaxyard.

"You here, madam!" he cried, drawing back in confusion.

"Yes, I have been here all the time that you have been in the conservatory," she returned. "I have heard all that has passed between you and my daughter, and I rejoice that she has behaved so well. For her sake, I will screen you from the indignation of the husband whose friendship and hospitality you have abused; but no consideration shall deter me from exposing you, if you ever seek to renew your infamous addresses. When you leave this house, all further intercourse between

you and my daughter—between you and the friend you have sought to wrong—must cease. You are warned."

Musgrave attempted no reply, and, indeed, had no time to make a reply, for at this juncture Bootle and Hornby entered the conservatory by the garden door.

"Halloa! what are you all doing here?" cried the foremost young man. "I thought you were gone to pack up your traps, Musgrave?"

"I have stopped Captain Musgrave," interposed Mrs. Flaxyard. "I want him to execute a commission for me in town to-morrow."

"In town!" exclaimed Bootle. "Is he going up on purpose?"

"Of course I am," replied Musgrave. "I would do anything to oblige Mrs. Flaxyard. She has engaged me on a confidential mission."

"What the deuce is it?" cried Hornby, astounded.

"Don't ask, sir," interposed his sister. "Don't you hear that it is a confidential matter?"

"Well, you are a wonderfully good-natured fellow, I must say," observed Bootle. "Catch me undertaking such an errand for my mother-in-law, or for any one else. When are you coming back?"

"Upon my soul, I don't know," rejoined Musgrave. "My return will depend upon circumstances."

"Over which you have no control," laughed Hornby.

"Exactly," rejoined Musgrave. "But, as I shall travel by the night-train, I must go and put up my things."

And he quitted the conservatory.

"There is some mystification in this," cried Hornby, as soon as he was gone. "Why has he changed his plans so suddenly? As to the commission, that's all bosh."

"Don't you be so inquisitive, sir," said Mrs.

Bootle. "Captain Musgrave is obliged to go to town."

"Obliged, eh? It's my opinion he has had a telegraphic message from his wife."

"That would send him in the opposite direction," laughed Bootle. "More likely he wants to get out of the way of Sir Norman. But let us go and look after luncheon."

XI.

THE PLAN IS ARRANGED.

On entering his own room, Musgrave found Emile there arranging his things.

Scarcely noticing the valet, he flung himself into an easy-chair near the fire. Emile waited for a minute or two before addressing him.

"Monsieur le Capitaine is really going away to-day?" he inquired.

"Going away for good," rejoined Musgrave, without looking up.

"I do not quite understand," observed the valet. "Monsieur will not return—is that it?"

"That's it. Monsieur can't return. His plan has been thwarted by Mrs. Flaxyard. She has thought it necessary to interfere."

"Diable! that's unlucky. Léontine told me that the old lady's suspicions were awakened. I hope she has not made mischief."

"She has succeeded in frightening her daughter; that's bad enough."

"Oh! if it's no more than that, monsieur need not be uneasy. The alarm will speedily pass. Léontine will easily reassure her mistress. After all, there is no real danger from Madame Flaxyard. But there *is* danger—great danger—from another person."

"You don't mean Mrs. Shelmerdine? She likes me."

"Monsieur thinks so. Perhaps she does. But if she likes monsieur, she hates her daughter-in-law, and would not scruple to destroy her. Since monsieur has done me the honour to employ me,

I have studied the affair; looked at it carefully on all sides. The real danger is from Madame Shelmerdine. I have watched her; and Léontine, so far as she could, has watched her. In fact, to tell you the plain truth, monsieur, she would willingly have employed Léontine as a spy upon her mistress; but, as I have already observed to you, the girl is honest."

"This is indeed a danger which I did not foresee," said Musgrave. "But a number of little circumstances convince me that you are right, Emile The old lady has completely taken me in. I thought myself quite safe in that quarter."

"You did well to employ me, monsieur. I can serve you effectually. Madame Shelmerdine meditates a vilain tour towards her daughter-in-law. Sooner or later, if you had remained here, she would have made some discovery, and then——"

"There would have been the devil to pay!" cried Musgrave, with a forced laugh. "I am glad

you have told me of this, Emile. It reconciles me to my departure."

"Will monsieur permit me to inquire his present plans? Surely he does not mean to abandon the game?"

"There is no help for it, Emile. All the chances are against me. It would be sheer madness now to think of returning to this house."

"Monsieur need not return. I do not for a moment advise it. But he has friends who can serve him in his absence."

"The game's up, I tell you, Emile. I made a desperate attempt this morning, but failed. I proposed flight to madame, but she indignantly rejected the proposition."

"You were too precipitate, monsieur. You need not despair. Madame is a great prize—such a prize as does not often turn up in the lottery of life, and pains must be taken to win her. If I am rightly informed—and it is the common talk

among the servants here, who ought to know the truth—she has a large fortune settled upon herself?"

"She has thirty thousand pounds which cannot be taken from her, do what she will. Madame is very pretty, and very captivating; but I will own to you, Emile, that her money is the grand attraction with me. An elopement with her has been always my idea, but as I have told you, she derides the proposition."

"If I enable you to carry her off, what will you give?"

"Whatever you choose to ask," cried Musgrave, eagerly. "Thirty per cent. on the thirty thousand. I will make your fortune. But though you are a deuced clever fellow, Emile, I have no great faith in your achieving an enterprise like this."

"Monsieur has yet to learn what I can do. But I shall work through the agency of Léontine, who must likewise be considered. In fact, the suc-

cess of the scheme will mainly depend upon her."

"She shall have a handsome *dot*. You shall have enough between you to set up business together in the Boulevart des Capucines. You should have something on account, but I am not in funds just now."

"Monsieur's word will suffice. We do not desire to be paid beforehand. Monsieur can send his full instructions to me, and they shall be attended to. All his letters shall be safely delivered to madame, and her answers forwarded as he may direct."

"You quite raise my spirits, Emile. I fancied the game was up, but now I begin to think I shall still win."

"Monsieur has everything in his favour. Madame is certainly in love—that is the main point. Léontine will take care to sharpen her regrets at his absence, and to keep his image constantly

before her. Next will come his letters—ardent, of course. More persuasion from Léontine. At last, at the right moment, the plan will be proposed; the decision made; and the elopement will take place."

Musgrave laughed. After some further discussion of their infamous project, he directed the valet to pack up his portmanteau, and prepared to go down-stairs.

"Mind one thing, Emile," he said. "Before I leave I shall say something to your master that will make him jealous—furiously jealous—of Sir Norman."

"I will attend to the hint, monsieur."

Luncheon being over, Musgrave proceeded to the drawing-room, where he found the whole party. Mrs. Shelmerdine, who had only just heard of his intended departure, expressed her great regret, and tried hard to induce him to stay over the ball. Failing in this, she expressed a hope

that he would soon pay them another visit, and the invitation was warmly seconded by her son.

"Mrs. Bootle will be quite disconsolate at your departure," remarked the old lady. "Out of consideration for her feelings you ought to come back soon."

"You will make Captain Musgrave a great deal too vain, mamma," said the younger lady. "I shall be sorry to lose him, of course, but I don't think I shall quite break my heart if he doesn't come back."

Captain Musgrave felt greatly flattered by the observations of both ladies, but feared it would be utterly impossible that he could return.

Mrs. Shelmerdine's unmistakable disappointment and ill-concealed annoyance convinced him of the correctness of the information he had just received from Emile.

The two old gentlemen did not make their appearance till dinner-time, and whatever they

might assert, we don't think that either was particularly sorry to lose the captain. The only person among the men who really regretted Musgrave's departure, was the one who had most reason to rejoice at it.

What Mrs. Bootle felt on the occasion we shall not inquire, but Mrs. Shelmerdine, who watched her carefully, could detect no emotion, neither could she intercept a significant glance, when the captain took leave. The pair were perfectly on their guard.

Musgrave's last words to Emile were, "I have done Sir Norman's business with your master."

So Musgrave quitted Belfield, and travelled up to town that night. He fixed his quarters, as he had told Emile he would, at the Charing Cross Hotel.

XII.

THE BALL AT BELFIELD.

NEXT day the expected guests arrived at Belfield.

The carriage, of course, met them at the Bury station, and brought them to the mansion. A general introduction took place in the entrance-hall, where Mr. and Mrs. Bootle and John, surrounded by a grand array of servants, received them. Even Mrs. Shelmerdine was present on the occasion, though she had declined to pay such a compliment to her daughter-in-law.

Mr. and Mrs. Flaxyard did not assist at the ceremony, thinking they were better away, and Hornby could not, having gone out that morning with the Cheshire fox-hounds. The manner in which Mrs. Bootle greeted Eva was a thing to see. She flew towards her as she entered, embraced her, and told her how enchanted she was to see her. Having introduced her darling boy and her darling boy's papa, she then led Eva to the stately Mrs. Shelmerdine, who, being very favourably impressed by the young lady's personal charms and refined manner, received her most graciously—as she subsequently did Sir Norman, for pretty much the same reasons. Even Mrs. Daventry had no cause to complain of the cordiality of her reception, for Mrs. Shelmerdine was unusually affable. Indeed, she was very well pleased with the party, offering, as they seemed to do in her eyes, a marked contrast to the vulgar Flaxyards.

"Oh, if Bootle had married a girl like this, how happy I should have been!" she mentally ejaculated, while regarding Eva. "She has the air and manner of a lady."

John, who did not stand upon much ceremony, had already shaken hands heartily with Sir Norman and welcomed him to Belfield, and Bootle followed suit, though in a far less cordial manner —Musgrave, as we know, having contrived to prejudice him against the handsome young baronet.

A great many obliging things having been said, which it would be tedious to repeat, Mrs. Bootle took the two ladies upstairs and showed them their rooms, with which they could not fail to be pleased. Nothing, indeed, could be more striking than the contrast offered by the gaily furnished and cheerful-looking rooms of Belfield to the sombre apartments of Hylton Castle, and Mrs. Daventry did not hesitate to say that she greatly

preferred the modern mansion. If her niece could not agree with her, she at least admitted that Belfield was a most delightful place.

Mrs. Daventry's opinion was shared by Susan, who shortly afterwards made her appearance, and declared, with an air of the most perfect sincerity, that these were the sort of rooms she liked, and that she shouldn't be at all afraid of sleeping in that pretty little French bed in the nice dressing-room.

Sir Norman had the room assigned him lately vacated by Musgrave, and Bootle, who introduced him to it, told him that his own valet, Emile, should attend to him, and with this assurance left him. Presently Emile tapped at the door, and the young baronet, having confided the keys of his malles to him, went down-stairs.

Finding that his host and Mr. Flaxyard were in the garden, he joined them, and passed an hour or so in inspecting the hot-houses, the stables, and

the grounds. By this time Sir Norman had seen enough of the place to satisfy himself that he was in excellent quarters, and he was further satisfied that Mr. Shelmerdine was a very good sort of fellow. Bootle did not please him so much, and he felt it would be rather difficult to get on with that young gentleman. On returning to the house, they found Bootle by himself in the billiard-room. Sir Norman played a game with him, and did not exalt himself in Bootle's opinion by the ease with which he beat him. They had just finished the game when Hornby came in, and, taking Bootle's place, proved a much better match for the young baronet.

There was a very agreeable dinner that day. In addition to the party staying in the house, there were the Huncoats, with Major Fullarton and Captain Frere, the major having been specially invited to meet his friend Sir Norman. Mrs. Shelmerdine's impressions in regard to both Sir Nor-

man and Miss Bracebridge were confirmed by further acquaintance with them. Eva's beauty was of a kind that compelled admiration, and she entirely eclipsed both Mrs. Bootle and Milicent Huncoat. But it was her manner more than her beauty that delighted Mrs. Shelmerdine, and the old lady again sighed internally as she thought that so charming a person had not fallen to Bootle's lot.

Eva's accomplishments, as we have heretofore had occasion to remark, were of a very high order. She played and sang delightfully, and Mrs. Shelmerdine declared emphatically that she had never before heard so good a private performer—never enjoyed so great a musical treat.

Sir Norman, who possessed the art of pleasing in an eminent degree, made himself extremely agreeable to everybody, except Bootle, who regarded him with growing dislike. Strange to say, our young friend was quite indifferent to the at-

tentions paid to his wife by Major Fullarton and Captain Frere; but when Sir Norman laughed and chatted with her, which he did as a matter of course, the silly fellow looked angry and jealous.

Not a word was said about Captain Musgrave either to Sir Norman or Eva. He might never have been in the house. The young baronet would not have been aware of his visit if Major Fullarton had not alluded to it as they were talking together. Greatly surprised by the information, Sir Norman took his friend aside, and put several questions to him. While they were thus conversing, the young baronet's brow darkened and his eye wandered towards Mrs. Bootle, who was chatting in a very lively manner at the time with Captain Frere.

"You really think he had a design in that quarter?" observed Sir Norman.

"I'm sure of it," replied the major. "Luckily, he's gone; and, for her sake, I hope he won't come

back. He's a deuced dangerous fellow, as you know."

Nothing more passed between them, for Bootle at the moment conducted Eva to the piano, and they both moved in that direction.

The party broke up early, as there was the ball on the morrow—at least, the Huncoats went away betimes, for all the others were staying in the house.

When the ladies had retired, Bootle and the other young men adjourned to the billiard-room, where they had seltzer-water and cognac, and smoked and played to a late hour. Emile, as usual, officiated as marker, and attended to their requirements. The wily valet, who had his eyes about him, remarked Bootle's sullen manner towards the young baronet, and felt sure that Musgrave's insinuations had taken effect. He also caught a few words that passed between Sir Norman and the major. These set him thinking,

and gave rise to a subsequent consultation with Léontine, the result of which will be shown anon.

On the next night, as the reader is aware, the ball was to take place, and as it was to be on a grand scale, considerable preparations had to be made for it. These had been going on, as far as practicable with a house full of company, for a week beforehand.

The large and well-ordered establishment at Belfield, though equal to most emergencies, was totally inadequate to the demands upon it on the present occasion. Waiters had to be hired by the dozen, as well as other assistants. Throughout the day the house was a scene of great confusion, and the usually imperturbable Mr. Knowles, to whom the arrangements were entrusted, was in a positive state of distraction. Very properly, we think, Mrs. Shelmerdine would not allow the grand saloon, with all its splendid furniture and ornaments, to be disturbed; so the morning-room,

which was not half the size, but which, however, was quite large enough for the purpose, was allotted to the dancers. The substantial part of the supper was prepared by Marcellin, but the glaces and some other things were furnished by a renowned Manchester confiseur. The band, which was an admirable one, came from the same city.

By dint of almost superhuman exertion on the part of Mr. Knowles and his assistants, among whom the most active and intelligent was Emile, all was got ready in time, and when the guests began to arrive about ten o'clock, they found the magnificent entrance-hall filled with hothouse plants and flowers, and the spacious saloon into which they were first ushered, and where they were received by Mrs. Shelmerdine and Mrs. Bootle, lighted up by a thousand tapers. The guests arrived so quickly, that very shortly afterwards a general move was made to the salon de danse, which was likewise very brilliantly illuminated,

the band being placed in the conservatory, which, as we know, opens out of that room. The ball commenced by a quadrille, in which the home party chiefly figured, Sir Norman having the honour of dancing with Mrs. Bootle, with Eva and Bootle vis-à-vis. Hornby of course had secured Milicent Huncoat. Opposite them were Major Fullarton and Miss Bacope.

Four prettier persons are not often beheld than those who took part in that quadrille, but the palm was unquestionably borne off by the belle demoiselle whom Bootle was lucky enough to obtain for a partner. He did not, however, sufficiently appreciate his happiness, but looked so moody, that his wife whispered, as she took his hand:

"What's the matter with you, darling boy?"

To this question he made no response.

Mrs. Bootle was lively enough, exquisitely dressed—indeed, there was no toilette in the room at all comparable to hers—and if she thought at

all of the absent, it was not apparently with regret. Her features were radiant with pride and delight. This fête, at which all her family were present, and of which she was queen, was the completion of her triumph. The exultant look that she gave her mother as she stood up with Sir Norman conveyed a great deal. Influenced by her vanity, caring very little what people might think, caring just as little for Eva's feelings, she wished to produce an impression that Sir Norman admired her, and talking to him in a very sprightly manner, forced him to adopt the same tone. This it was that darkened Bootle's brow, and ravaged his heart. Eva likewise was annoyed, and for the first time began to understand that she really liked Sir Norman.

"My dear little husband is quite jealous of you, I can see, Sir Norman," laughed Mrs. Bootle. "If I can only make Eva jealous, your business will be done in that quarter. Ask me to valse

with you. I can give you number four. Will that do?"

Sir Norman replied very gallantly that she had only just anticipated him; declaring that he had meant to ask her for that very valse, and adding, rather mysteriously, as she thought, that he had a word for her private ear.

"What could it be?" she thought to herself. Could she have captivated *him*. That were indeed a triumph.

Sir Norman had previously engaged Eva for the first valse, and of course they danced it together, but it was evident that she was piqued, and some of her observations were so pointed, that Sir Norman became piqued in his turn, and a slight—very slight—disagreement ensued.

Eva's annoyance was increased when she saw her suitor, who seemed to her to be completely enthralled, lead the syren out for a valse. Bootle did not dance after the first quadrille—his rôle

being to provide people with partners and furnish them with programmes—and he, too, was highly incensed at the proceeding, though he did not make himself ridiculous by noticing it.

Mrs. Bootle greatly enjoyed the valse with Sir Norman, but declared, when it was finished, that she must have a little repose. So she threw over Major Fullarton, who came to claim her for the Lancers, promising him another dance later on, and, still retaining the young baronet's arm, took him to the library, which, like all the rooms, except the dining-room, where supper was to be served, was thrown open.

There were a few couples in the library when they entered it—amongst others, Hornby and Milicent Huncoat—but these soon disappeared, and, by the time they had seated themselves on a sofa, they were left alone.

Mrs. Bootle laughed as she looked round the large empty room, and said,

"People will think we are going to have a desperate flirtation—but never mind! I am dying with curiosity to learn what you have to tell me, Sir Norman."

"I hope I shan't offend you by what I have to say," he rejoined, looking very serious, "but I must run the risk."

"Oh no! I'm not easily offended," she cried. "Speak! I am ready to listen."

"I am about to undertake a part which I have no right to assume," he said. "I am going to put you on your guard against the designs of a villain. I will not breathe his name, but, for Heaven's sake, beware of him!"

"I won't for a moment affect to misunderstand you, Sir Norman," she returned, with a look of displeasure; "but I fancy I am able to take care of myself."

"Do not be angry with me," he said. "I feel so strongly the peril in which you are placed by

this man, that I must point it out to you. To a certain extent you are aware of the misery he has caused, but I could tell you things of him that would make you abhor him."

"You are not quite unprejudiced, Sir Norman."

"I am well informed. What I say to you I would say to his face, and would have so said it, had I found him here. If you care to know aught of his deeply injured wife, ask Eva, who will give some particulars concerning her that cannot fail to excite your profound commiseration. You knew her, I think, when she was in Paris?"

"Yes, and was greatly charmed with her. Where is she now?"

"I am not at liberty to tell, but she has found a secure retreat. Poor lady! she is in a very precarious state of health, and I think her troubles will soon be over. This is a sad tale, and I would not have told it at such a moment, but I feel that you ought to know it. I cannot relate Mrs.

Musgrave's history, nor is it needful. But the villain who now dares to raise his eyes towards you has behaved with the blackest perfidy towards her, and has for ever destroyed her happiness."

"You need not alarm yourself about him. He is not likely to return here."

"That assurance might relieve my uneasiness did I not know him. But if he has once formed a design, he will not easily abandon it. Though banished, he may find means of secretly communicating with you. But do not answer his letters. Be sure his object is to ensnare you."

While he was addressing her thus earnestly, neither of them remarked that Bootle and Mrs. Shelmerdine had entered the library. Mother and son exchanged significant looks. They could not, of course, hear what Sir Norman was saying, but his manner almost warranted the construction they put upon it, and the way in which Mrs. Bootle agitated

her fan showed that she was greatly excited. She was just about to answer the young baronet's last observations, when she caught sight of the intruders, and, mistress as she was of herself, could scarcely hide her confusion. Sir Norman himself appeared slightly embarrassed.

An explosion of jealousy on the part of Bootle would infallibly have taken place if a glance from his mother had not restrained him.

"Were you looking for me, darling boy?" inquired Mrs. Bootle, getting up, while Sir Norman arose at the same time.

"Yes, we have been looking for you everywhere," replied Bootle, sharply. "Emile told us you were in the library."

"I came here for a few minutes to rest myself after the valse, and have been listening to a deeply interesting story from Sir Norman."

"But you ought not to have run away with Sir

Norman from the ball-room, my dear," remarked Mrs. Shelmerdine. "The young ladies won't forgive you."

"Well, I'll take him back at once, and make them happy," cried Mrs. Bootle. "They have only lost him for a single dance."

And taking Sir Norman's arm, she hastened with him to the ball-room. On their way they passed Emile, who was standing near the door of the library.

After resigning Mrs. Bootle to Major Fullarton, Sir Norman sought out Eva in order to make his peace with her, but was rather coldly received.

The spirit and gaiety of the ball were in no wise affected by these incidents, which, indeed, were unnoticed. Bootle had to conceal his anger under a smiling exterior, but fresh fuel was added to his jealousy when Sir Norman took his wife to supper.

A splendid supper it was, with no end of cham-

pagne, and for two or three hours afterwards dancing was continued with unabated spirit.

Long before this, Eva had begun to feel a little weary; but as she was staying in the house, she could not very well retire till the ball was brought to a close.

To the guests generally the party afforded unmitigated satisfaction. All the young ladies had plenty of partners, and several of them made conquests. The elderly people certainly enjoyed the supper. Mr. and Mrs. Flaxyard, who were playing a rubber at the time when the little incident occurred in the library, and were entirely ignorant of it, thought the ball had gone off admirably. So did Mr. Shelmerdine, who heard nothing but praises of his daughter-in-law. So did Hornby, who had proposed to Milicent, who was accepted, with a reference, of course, to papa.

If Mrs. Bootle wore a mask, it was so pretty, so bright, so natural, that no one could have

suspected what was beneath it. Throughout the evening she seemed full of spirit and enjoyment, and exhibited no symptoms of flagging even at the close. There must have been a certain witchery about her, since all her partners thought her enchanting.

The only malcontent was Bootle.

Late as it was, the young men who were staying in the house repaired to the smoking-room to talk over the events of the evening.

Hornby got a good deal chaffed, but didn't mind it.

XIII.

MACHINATIONS OF LÉONTINE.

NEARLY a week had elapsed since the ball, and the whole party were still staying at Belfield. Mr. and Mrs. Flaxyard had begun to find themselves quite at home, and did not like to move. Besides, the old gentleman had now another matrimonial affair to arrange—Mr. Huncoat having given his consent to Hornby's union with Milicent. Eva Bracebridge and her aunt still remained, and of course Sir Norman tarried likewise.

As we have seen, there was a good deal of

society in the neighbourhood, and what with a concert, and an assembly at Manchester, and three large dinner-parties, the week was almost filled up. The mornings were got through in various ways—riding, driving, lounging about, and billiards.

All this time Bootle's jealousy of Sir Norman was on the increase, and he had perpetual quarrels in private with his wife on the subject of the young baronet. His mother's remarks, too, had materially aggravated the feeling.

One morning Mrs. Shelmerdine was passing along the gallery towards her own room, when she saw Léontine come out of her mistress's boudoir, and being struck by the soubrette's expression, took her to her dressing-room.

"Shut the door, Léontine, she said. "You look as if you wished to speak to me?"

"I have been anxious to speak to you for some time, madame but have not had the courage,"

replied the artful soubrette "Some things are very painful to relate—still more painful to hear. You will understand what I mean, madame," she continued, with a remarkably expressive look and gesture.

"Yes, I fancy I do," replied Mrs. Shelmerdine. "But pray be explicit, Léontine. Don't mind giving me pain, if you have anything to tell that I ought to learn."

"You will remember, madame, that you put some questions to me relative to Captain Musgrave. At that time I was able to relieve your anxiety —but now——"

"Well!"

"I think there is a certain gentleman who is—how shall I say it?—épris de ma maîtresse. M. Bootle est très jaloux. Madame laughs at him, but he takes the matter seriously. I fear there may be a great quarrel between them. Monsieur est très violent."

you have told me of this, Emile. It reconciles me to my departure."

"Will monsieur permit me to inquire his present plans? Surely he does not mean to abandon the game?"

"There is no help for it, Emile. All the chances are against me. It would be sheer madness now to think of returning to this house."

"Monsieur need not return. I do not for a moment advise it. But he has friends who can serve him in his absence."

"The game's up, I tell you, Emile. I made a desperate attempt this morning, but failed. I proposed flight to madame, but she indignantly rejected the proposition."

"You were too precipitate, monsieur. You need not despair. Madame is a great prize—such a prize as does not often turn up in the lottery of life, and pains must be taken to win her. If I am rightly informed—and it is the common talk

Mrs. Shelmerdine did not seem at all pained by this narration.

"Do my son and his wife frequently quarrel, Léontine?" she asked.

"Sans cesse, madame. They have quarrelled ever since the ball, when something occurred—I know not what—to excite M. Bootle's suspicions. Madame aime à faire la coquette, vous savez. No harm in that. All the same, these constant quarrels may have ill consequences. Madame Bootle has great spirit. She may resent such treatment."

"Does she complain to you, Léontine?"

"Mais oui, madame—souvent. I fear she may do something rash. That is why I venture to speak to you. Can you not advise M. Bootle? He will assuredly listen to you—his mother. By his present conduct he may provoke his wife beyond endurance. He may bring about the

very result he dreads. Ma foi! that is the way with men."

"You are quite in your mistress's confidence, I know, Léontine. I won't ask you to betray it. But——"

"It is my zeal for my mistress that induces me to speak, madame. She is so young, so pretty, so captivating, that she cannot fail to be admired. Madame must allow that M. Bootle's jealousy of Sir Norman is absurd—causeless."

"Humph!" ejaculated Mrs. Shelmerdine. "Not altogether causeless, Léontine. My son, I think, has grounds for jealousy. I cannot bid him shut his eyes, or hold his tongue. If your mistress would cease to flirt with Sir Norman, her husband would cease to be jealous."

"But I try to point out to you, madame, that there is danger in the course pursued by M. Bootle; and if he persists in it, he will drive my mistress to extremities."

"No fear of that, Léontine. Your mistress is far too discreet."

"But perhaps a word might prevent mischief Will not madame utter it?"

"I cannot interfere in a matter so delicate, Léontine," replied Mrs. Shelmerdine, decidedly. "Nevertheless, I am greatly obliged to you for the information you have given me. You must allow me to make you a little present. If you have anything more to communicate, pray come to me."

So the soubrette departed, having accomplished her purpose, and leaving Mrs. Shelmerdine delighted at the prospect of a rupture between Bootle and his wife.

XIV.

MACHINATIONS OF EMILE.

More than once had it occurred to Bootle to put some questions to Emile in regard to Sir Norman, but he did not exactly know how to set about the matter. However, the wily valet, who seemed to divine his intentions, saved him the trouble by broaching the subject.

Thus he remarked one morning while assisting Bootle to dress:

"Will monsieur allow me to ask him if Sir Norman is a prétendant to the hand of Mademoiselle Eva?"

"So I understand, Emile. But why the deuce do you ask? Do you think he pays more attention to some one else than to Miss Bracebridge —eh?"

"I dare not exactly tell monsieur what I think," replied the valet, with a demure look.

"But I will have it out of you, Emile."

"Has not monsieur some notion of what I mean?"

"Well, perhaps, I have. I have fancied—but never mind what I have fancied—I may be wrong."

"No, monsieur, your conclusions are correct. You cannot disbelieve your own eyes. Impossible to mistake the scene in the library on the night of the ball. I sent monsieur there on purpose. I do not like him to be duped."

"What do you mean by 'duped,' Emile?" cried Bootle, fiercely. "Explain yourself. Do

you dare to insinuate that my honour has been outraged by this cursed baronet?"

"Oh no, monsieur! I insinuate no such thing. But I am sure he pays court to madame. Besides things that have come under my own observation, the questions he asks me prove the interest he takes in her."

"Then he talks to you about her? ha!"

"His passion renders him indiscreet—but, after all, there is no harm in it. Madame merely amuses herself with him, and his vanity is flattered by the trifling encouragement she gives him. Voilà tout."

"No, it's not all. He's an infernally dangerous fellow. Captain Musgrave cautioned me in regard to him. I ought never to have let him into the house. But I cannot get rid of him just now without a disturbance. I tell you what it is, Emile. You must play the spy upon him."

"It is not a part I like, monsieur, but I am ready to do anything you may desire. I think you could at once put a stop to the affair."

"In what way, Emile?"

"By telling madame decidedly—very decidedly—that you won't allow it."

"I have told her so, Emile, but she only laughs at me. She denies most emphatically that Sir Norman does make love to her."

"What does she say to the interview in the library?"

"She scarcely condescends to give any explanation at all—but she pretends that Sir Norman had some communication to make to her."

"That is what I meant by saying that monsieur is duped."

"But you are wrong, Emile. I am neither duped by my wife nor by Sir Norman. I see plainly what they are both about, and I constantly tell her so. It is that which so much provokes

her. Last night she threatened to leave me, if I continued to annoy her."

"A silly menace. Monsieur need not mind it. He should be still more energetic—dreadfully energetic. That is the only way to put a stop to the affair."

"I'll follow your advice, Emile—put myself in a towering passion. I'll frighten her."

"That's it, monsieur. Frighten her."

Later on in the same day, the valet and the femme de chambre met to compare notes. Evidently, their plan was to disgust Mrs. Bootle with her husband, and induce her to elope with Musgrave, three or four impassioned letters from whom had already been delivered to the infatuated lady by Léontine.

The plot was most unintentionally assisted from another quarter. Naturally, Mrs. Flaxyard was made the receptacle of her daughter's complaints of Bootle's absurd jealousy of Sir Norman, and as,

in this instance, the good lady was convinced that her son-in-law's suspicions were groundless, she was highly indignant. From many things which she herself noticed, and from the artful representations of Léontine, she felt certain that Bootle was incited by his mother, and she therefore added her own opposition to what she believed to be an insidious attack on her daughter's happiness, and counselled vigorous resistance on the part of Mrs. Bootle.

Of course Mrs. Flaxyard was in complete ignorance of the real state of affairs, and had no idea of the web in which her daughter was entangled. She knew nothing whatever of the letters which Mrs. Bootle had received from Musgrave, and had not the slightest suspicion of the snares contrived by the French servants, who were in his pay. She did not even comprehend Mrs. Shelmerdine's sinister designs, but merely fancied that the malignant old lady was endeavouring to foment a quarrel between the young couple.

Deluded by this belief, Mrs. Flaxyard upheld her daughter in her disputes with Bootle.

The effect of these various circumstances, we regret to say, was highly prejudicial to Mrs. Bootle. Musgrave's letters quite unsettled her. As yet she had returned no answer to them; but he was promptly informed by Emile of the effect they had produced, and wrote again and again, and with increasing ardour. Still, though shaken and wavering, the infatuated lady came to no decision.

How, during this struggle, she maintained her usual gay demeanour we can scarcely pretend to say, though we know that she was an accomplished actress. But none of those around her — except, perhaps, Sir Norman — suspected the truth.

Little more than a puppet in the hands of the designing valet and of his vindictive mother, Bootle acted just as they chose to pull the strings.

His jealousy was constantly excited by the false statements of Emile, and his resentment kept alive by the remarks of his mother. Never before had he made himself so disagreeable to his wife as by his present conduct.

Thus aided, the contrivers of the infamous plot felt certain of success.

Our worthy friends Mr. Shelmerdine and Mr. Flaxyard were entirely ignorant of what was going on, and never dreamed of the serious misunderstanding between the young couple. They both, however, perceived that Bootle disliked Sir Norman; but this circumstance did not trouble them, and only made John more attentive to his guest.

We have intimated that Sir Norman had some suspicion of the truth. But it was merely suspicion. From his knowledge of Musgrave's character he felt almost certain that he would try to keep up a clandestine correspondence with Mrs. Bootle, and he discerned the means of doing so

through the agency of the French servants. But he knew not how to act. Having ventured, one day, to make a few observations about Musgrave to Bootle, they were taken in extremely bad part, and produced the opposite effect from that intended. Bootle became quite warm in the captain's defence. On another occasion, when Sir Norman sought an opportunity of a little private conversation with Mrs. Bootle, they were interrupted in their tête-à-tête by the jealous husband; so no good result ensued.

Though he had thus surmised the truth, the young baronet failed to perceive that he himself was merely used as a tool to excite Bootle's jealousy. Sir Norman, indeed, was rather awkwardly circumstanced. Eva was as jealous of Mrs. Bootle—and as unreasonably so—as Bootle was jealous of him. If he sat next the charming coquette at dinner, all his looks and words were sure to be misinterpreted. Mrs. Bootle, who

had a little malice in her composition, liked to tease her friend, and so made matters worse; but, on the whole, we are inclined to think she assisted Sir Norman's suit. Eva could no longer affect to be indifferent to the young baronet. Still, her manner did not encourage him to make a fresh proposal.

XV.

A LAST ADIEU.

Eva had made more than one attempt to terminate her visit, but she was prevailed upon by Mrs. Bootle to prolong her stay, and good-natured Mr. Shelmerdine would not allow Sir Norman to take his departure. During all this time, Eva had heard nothing from Hylton Park; but one morning she received a couple of letters, which she reserved for perusal in her own room.

The first she opened was from her guardian. It had been sent on by Mrs. Austin. Its contents greatly surprised and distressed her. She

learned from it that Mr. Pomfret had been seriously ill. On reaching Suez, en route to India, he had been seized by fever, consequent, no doubt, on his recent severe accident, and had been utterly unable to proceed to Madras. After a long detention at Suez, he recovered sufficiently to move to Cairo, where he had a return of fever; but he was now better, and having abandoned his intended voyage to India for the present, meant to return immediately to England.

"I have heard nothing from you, or from any one since I left," he wrote in conclusion, "but I have a strange presentiment of ill which I cannot shake off. Having experienced the same sort of feeling before, and found it justified, I cannot despise the warning. I have therefore postponed my voyage to Madras for a time, and shall return at once to England, where I trust to arrive very shortly after this letter.

"Heaven grant that I may find you all well, and that my foreboding of calamity may prove groundless! When I thought myself dying at Suez—and I was nearly at death's door—my chief desire was to see Sophy—to bid her an eternal adieu. And now I fear I shall never have that consolation, for something tells me she is no more.

"It will rejoice me to find that you have at last consented to bestow your hand upon Sir Norman. If this should be so, may you long enjoy the happiness which has been denied to

"YOUR UNFORTUNATE GUARDIAN."

The perusal of this letter, as we have said, occasioned Eva great distress, and she remained for some time reflecting upon the series of disasters that had befallen her guardian.

She then opened the other letter, which was far more bulky than the first. It was from Sophy,

though the address was not in her handwriting, but in that of Mrs. Carew.

"I cannot tell you how much I have missed you, dearest Eva. When you were near me, you sent constant messages by Mrs. Austin, and never failed to visit me morning and evening, and sometimes more frequently—in my little cell, as you designate my chamber. I never then felt the solitude in the slightest degree irksome. When I used to wander with you over those vast dismantled apartments, and look out upon the park, I never wished to quit this retreat—never wished for other society than yours; but now that you have left me, dearest girl, I sometimes feel that I am quite alone.

"Yes, quite alone! I ought not to indulge the feeling, and blame myself for it, because I have kind, good Mrs. Austin with me, and she is even more attentive than heretofore. But I cannot talk to her, as I can to you. I am really a recluse now.

All my time is passed in meditation and prayer. I rarely quit my cell during the daytime; but at night—for I sleep indifferently—I wander like a ghost about the great deserted rooms. How weird they look when flooded by moonlight, and how well suited to such a thin, shadowy, phantom-like object as I have become! It will not be long, I think, ere I shall have entered the world of spirits.

"Do not let anything I may say about myself, dearest Eva, cause you the slightest uneasiness, or interrupt your happiness for a moment. To me, withdrawal from this world can only be a merciful release from trouble. Therefore, if I am suddenly taken, you must not grieve, but rather rejoice that I am at rest. Come when it may, I hope to be prepared for the blow. My repentance has been deep and sincere. Certain symptoms convince me that the end is not far off. I grow daily feebler, and am wasting so rapidly, that I shall soon be fully qualified for the part of a phantom. Austin im-

plores me to have medical advice; but I steadily refuse. What good can medicine do me? What surgeon can cure a broken heart?"

"A thousand thanks for your amiable letter, conveyed to me through Austin. I am glad to learn that you are so much pleased with Belfield, and trust you will continue to enjoy the visit. Little as I now care for society, your description of the Shelmerdine family interested me, and for the moment diverted me. You place them all before me. I can see the worthy and warm-hearted cotton-spinner, his stately wife, and the silly young couple. From your account of her, Mrs. Bootle Shelmerdine does not seem to be much changed, or at all improved by marriage. Coquetry is too much part of her nature to be ever eradicated. Her conduct to her husband—foolish as he is—appears to me inexcusable. I hope she will go on

well; but I have great fears, and you will guess why, since you tell me that a certain person, whom I will not name, has been visiting in the house. Ah! if she only knew him as I know him! If she could only understand his falsehood and perfidy—if she could discern the black heart that lurks beneath his breast—she would not be beguiled by him.

"One word on another matter with which that silly coquette is mixed up. Out of my love for you, out of my earnest desire for your happiness, dearest Eva, I must tell you that you are wrong to entertain even a momentary doubt of Sir Norman's fealty. From all you have told me of him, I am certain his nature is loyal and chivalrous. Do not mistrust him. That a coquette like Mrs. Bootle may try to captivate him does not surprise me; but her lures will be vain. She will never detach him from you, for I am certain that he loves you profoundly. You do not posi-

tively confess that you requite his passion, but the uneasiness you display in regard to this silly creature convinces me that you do love him. Forgive me, if I say that you have trifled with him too long. Having tested his devotion, you ought now to reward it. He will make you happy. He will grace you with a title, and in return you will restore his fallen fortunes. I shall not live to see this ancient mansion restored, but I foresee that it will be so.

"You know that you have confided to me the secrets of your heart, and that I am aware you long indulged a hopeless passion. The obstacle to the realisation of that dream will soon be removed. But even when Julian is free, I do not think he will take another bride. None could be worthier of your love than he—no man, under certain circumstances, could have made you happier. But his heart is seared. He will never love again. Therefore, I rejoice to find that you

have transferred your affections to a high-born, honourable man, who loves you devotedly, and who will be to you what your guardian never could be!

"As I offer this heartfelt aspiration for your happiness—for the most unhappy woman in the world may wish happiness to another—the thought crosses me that I shall never behold Julian again. He is far away, and cannot return before all is over. My lips will then be mute. But say to him, I implore you, dear girl, that which I would say with my last breath were he near me—that I have never ceased to regret the wrong I have done him. If penitence can expiate the offence, mine is expiated."

"I have a horrid event to relate, but it must be told. I have mentioned that I have lately been in the habit of wandering at night through the suite of disused rooms contiguous to my cell

I have never been alarmed during these nocturnal rambles, for I have no superstitious fears; but last night I was greatly terrified, as you shall hear.

"I had completed my walk, and was slowly retracing my steps through the long room, occasionally pausing to look out upon the park, which was beautifully lighted up by a full moon, when I distinctly heard a sound in the apartment I had just quitted.

"I listened intently, thinking I must be deceived. The next moment a figure appeared at the door. It was he—my eternal persecutor. I screamed, but no one could hear me, and fear rooted me to the spot. He was beside me instantly.

"'You cannot hide yourself from me, you see,' he cried. 'I am sure to find you out. You fancied yourself safe here, but I have managed to reach you. You wonder how I discovered

your retreat, and how I obtained admittance. I don't mean to enlighten you on those points, but I will tell you thus much—I didn't make use of a window. My last experience in that line was not pleasant. That cursed Myddleton Pomfret caused me to be shot at by a fellow whom he had planted on the bridge. Luckily, the bungler missed his aim. I hope Pomfret gave you the money I left with him?'

"'You may be certain that he did,' I rejoined. 'Is it to satisfy yourself on the point that you have come hither? If so, you are answered, and may depart.'

"'Not just yet,' he replied. 'I am glad to learn that you got the money. You cannot have spent much of it, for you can be at no earthly expense here. You must lend it me again for a short time—a month at the outside.'

"'For what wicked purpose do you require the money?' I asked.

"'For no wicked purpose at all,' he replied. 'I have a chance, and don't want to throw it away.'

"Something prompted me what to say to him.

"'A chance of running away with some foolish woman — Mrs. Bootle Shelmerdine perhaps — is that it?'

"He recoiled; proclaiming by his surprise and confusion that I had guessed the truth.

"'I will never assist your infamous schemes,' I continued. 'Begone!'

"'Not without the money,' he rejoined, recovering himself. 'You have it, I know. Fetch it at once!'

"On my firm refusal, he seized me by the arm, and strove to drag me along. I resisted; but the little strength I possess soon failed me, and I fell to the ground. He looked at me as I lay in an almost fainting state, but without a trace of compassion on his countenance, and then despairing,

I suppose, of obtaining his object, quitted the room as he had entered it. How I regained my cell I scarcely know, but my first impulse was to make fast the door.

"When Austin came to me in the morning she was quite alarmed by my appearance, and declared that I looked so ill that I must have advice. My malady indeed has been greatly aggravated by the shock I have received. My sufferings have been severe, but I will not pain you by a description of them. They cannot endure much longer.

"Feeling certain of this, and that I ought not to remain here, I have again—and for the last time—appealed to dear Mrs. Carew's motherly affection, and entertain no doubt that she will come for me in the course of the day. You may therefore conclude that I have been removed to her house, and that I am lying in the little couch in which her daughter died.

"It has cost me a great effort to send you this

narrative, but I wished you to know precisely what has happened, since I feel that the scene I have just gone through will hasten the inevitable catastrophe.

"In all probability, these lines are the last I shall ever address to you. Farewell, dearest Eva —farewell for ever! I embrace you in the spirit. Think tenderly of me. When you see Julian, console him, for my heart now tells me he will need consolation.

"A last adieu!

"SOPHY."

XVI.

A BROKEN HEART.

WITH eyes well-nigh blinded with tears Eva concluded the foregoing letter.

But there was an enclosure from Mrs. Carew, and to this she anxiously turned, as soon as she could master her emotion.

MRS. CAREW'S LETTER.

"I have sad tidings to relate, my dear Miss Bracebridge, but I will write as firmly as I can.

"Poor dear Sophy entrusted the accompanying letter to me, giving me an injunction in regard to it, with which I felt bound to comply.

"I brought her here two days ago—on the afternoon of the day mentioned in her letter—and as Austin came with us in the carriage, the removal was effected without much distress to the dear sufferer. At all events, she bore it without a murmur.

"As we passed the little church adjoining my residence, she looked towards it, and then, turning to me, whispered:

"'Lay me in that churchyard, near your daughter.'

"I pressed her hand gently, and she understood me, for her wan features were lighted with a smile. It consoles me to recal these slight circumstances now. She smiled again as we approached the house, and remarked:

"'How pretty it looks. I feel as if I were coming home. I shall never cross this drawbridge again, except——' And her voice failed her.

"The servants were all collected at the door,

gazing at her wistfully. The gardener displayed most emotion, though I did not imagine the rugged old man could shed a tear. But the sternest heart might have been melted. We carried her up-stairs, poor dear, for she was far too feeble to walk, and those who bore her said she was light enough. She was conveyed to her own room, and when placed in her little bed by Austin, seemed easier than she had done before, and murmured:

"'My prayer is granted. Here I wished to die!'

"You know the bereavement I have endured, dear Miss Bracebridge. At that moment Sophy looked so like my own lost child that I felt as if the sad scene were being re-enacted, and was obliged to rush out of the room to give vent to my distress.

"While I was away, Mr. Southwood saw her, and afterwards informed me that there was not a

hope of recovery. She was in the last stage of a deep decline. The case must have been hopeless from the first, but the progress of the disease had been accelerated by the shock she had just undergone. The crisis could not be far off.

"'I can do little for her,' he said, 'except to ease her sufferings. She is perfectly aware of her condition, and, in all my professional experience, I have never seen any one more resigned, or apparently better prepared.'

"As soon as I had got my feelings under control—and this was no easy task—I went back to her, and the sight almost upset me again. Austin was sitting beside the bed, and rose to give me her place. Never shall I forget the angelic smile bestowed upon me by the sweet sufferer. How beautiful she looked! but her beauty was no longer of earth. Her features were wasted, but the delicate outline was preserved, and the large eyes had even more than their former brilliancy.

"'You have heard what Mr. Southwood thinks of me?' she said. 'He tried to disguise his opinion from me, but I soon induced him to speak frankly.'

"I could not trust myself to make any direct reply, but she tried to cheer me by her looks, and becoming more composed, though my voice still faltered, I inquired whether she wished to have any of her relations summoned.

"She answered in the negative, alleging that the presence of her sister, for whom she felt the greatest affection, but whose character differed essentially from her own, might disturb the tranquil frame of mind she had arrived at, while her father's state of health was such that he could not support the meeting. She charged me to write to them, but not till all was over. She wished all her money to be given to her sister, and, indeed, everything she possessed, except a few trifles, about which she gave special directions. To my inquiries

whether I should write to you, she simply replied:

"'Not yet. I have told you when to send her my letter.'

"She spoke much of her dear Eva, and always with heartfelt gratitude and affection. Very fervent were her wishes for your happiness, and more than once she exclaimed:

"'I hope she will marry Sir Norman.'

"Austin, who is greatly attached to her young master, assured her that she might rest easy on that score.

"With a tranquillity that was really surprising, though inexpressibly affecting, she spoke to me of a great many matters, and gave me particular directions, which of course I shall attend to. She has left a ring for you, given her by Julian, which she hopes you will wear for her sake, as well as for *his* sake.

"After she had been talking for some time she

became silent, and her eyes being closed I thought she slumbered. I noticed many changes in her countenance, and at last, fancying something pained her, I gently touched her, and she at once opened her eyes.

" 'I have been thinking over my past life,' she said. 'I have known so little happiness during my brief career that I can bid the world farewell with scarely a regret. Yes, I have one regret,' she added, with an irrepressible pang, which showed itself in her countenance. 'I should like to see Julian again—if only for a moment.'

"I did not dare to give her a hope, because I feared she would never again behold him on earth."

" That night Austin watched by her couch. The dear patient slept little, and appeared disturbed and feverish.

"Next day, Mr. Southwood again visited her, and, finding her very feeble, gave her some slight stimulant, which revived her; but she was evidently rapidly sinking.

"An eager desire to see Julian had now taken possession of her, and she asked me if I thought he would come. But before I could reply, she exclaimed:

"'How unreasonable I am to put such a question, when I know he is in India.'

"Just then, Austin, who had left the room a short time previously returned. I could see from her looks that she had something to communicate. As she came up she said, in a low voice, that I was wanted down-stairs.

Softly as she spoke, Sophy, whose sense of hearing was preternaturally quickened, caught the words, and fixing her eyes inquiringly on the old housekeeper, said:

"'Is he come?'

"I was terrified by the excitement she displayed, fearing it might prove fatal.

"'What is to be done, Austin?' I said. 'Try and calm her.'

"'Go down-stairs at once, madam,' rejoined the housekeeper, in a low voice. 'I will prepare her.'

"Not a word was lost by Sophy, who exclaimed with a look of agonised impatience:

"'Ah, he *is* come! I knew it. Oh, let me see him! Bring him instantly, or I shall die! Go, I adjure you!'

"I needed no further exhortation, but hurried down-stairs.

"There, indeed, was Julian.

"He had just returned—not from India, but from Egypt, where he had been detained by illness, and had arrived, almost providentially, before it was too late. He had been to Hylton Park, and, learning what had taken place, had come on at

once to my house. He appeared fearfully changed, and his looks betokened the most intense anxiety. After exchanging a few hasty words with him, I led him up-stairs, beseeching him, as we went, to maintain his composure.

"I want words to describe the scene that followed as I opened the door. A cry, such as I never heard before, but that thrilled to my very heart, burst from Sophy as she caught sight of him. While I was absent, Austin had propped her up with pillows. On entering the room, Julian stood still for a moment as if transfixed. He then rushed forward, and threw himself on his knees by the bed, while she clasped her arms round his neck. In this attitude they remained for a short space, and nothing could be heard but half-stifled sobs.

"At last she raised herself, and said:

"'Look up, dear Julian—look up! Let me gaze on your beloved features once more before my eyes grow dim.' And as he complied, she added,

'You look ill—very ill! What ails you, dearest Julian?'

"'Waste not a thought on me,' he replied. 'Have you aught to tell me? Is there aught I can do?'

"'You can make my last moments happy by a word,' she rejoined. 'Say you forgive me!'

"'I do forgive you, from the bottom of my heart, my ever dear Sophy,' he rejoined. 'I have never ceased to love you.'

"'Oh! this is too much bliss!' she cried. 'It suffocates me Yet say it once more. Say you love me, Julian—and kiss me!'

"He repeated the words, pressed his lips to hers, and received her last breath.

"He laid her gently on the pillow, and remained gazing in mute despair on her angelic countenance, which wore a smile even in death. Not a groan escaped him.

"We allowed him to remain thus for some

little time, but at last I took his hand with the intent of leading him away.

"He offered no resistance; but just as we reached the door he turned round, and, with a fearful cry, rushed towards the body, and clasped it to his breast."

XVII.

SIR NORMAN MAKES A DISCOVERY.

SIR NORMAN, with Bootle and Hornby, were out that day with the Cheshire foxhounds. They had some famous runs; killed three foxes—Sir Norman was in at the death of two of them—and only just got back in time to dress for dinner. They were all much surprised to learn that Eva and Mrs. Daventry had left Belfield that afternoon. The cause of their sudden departure was the receipt by Miss Bracebridge of very distressing intelligence, which completely un-

fitted her for society, and necessitated this abrupt termination of her visit.

Such was the explanation afforded by Knowles, while delivering to the young baronet a letter which Eva had left for him. Sir Norman hurried with this letter to his own room, and, fastening the door that he might not be disturbed, read as follows:

EVA'S LETTER.

"I have just learnt from Mrs. Carew that poor Sophy's sorrows are over. As I could neither indulge my grief unrestrained in this house, nor answer the questions that would naturally be put to me, I shall hurry away as soon as possible, and get my aunt to make my excuses and adieux. If I can help it, I shall not see Mrs. Bootle before my departure. There are circumstances connected with this sad event which would make any conversation with her, at this juncture, excessively painful to me.

"I have much to tell you—much that will surprise and afflict you, but I am so overwhelmed with grief that I can scarcely write. There are one or two things, however, that I must mention. Poor dear Sophy, as you know, when I left her —how could I leave her!—was in a most precarious state. But her death was accelerated by another nocturnal visit from the perfidious villain who betrayed her. He came to her, as before, for money, and when she refused him—for she guessed the base purpose for which he sought the loan—his violence killed her. I say killed her; for though she lingered for two days, she never recovered from the terrible shock. I look upon Musgrave as her murderer.

"I shall ever regret that I was not with her at the last. Yet she was most carefully tended by Mrs. Carew and Austin, and she had a consolation which my presence could not have afforded her. As if in answer to her supplications, some

pitying angel brought Julian to her at the last moment. He had been detained by illness in Egypt, and was unable to prosecute his voyage to India. A warning voice seemed to call him back, and he obeyed the summons. It is well he did so. He arrived in time. A few moments later, and all would have been over. But she still lived, though the spirit was ready to take its flight. She saw him. She knew him. She heard his well-known voice. She received his forgiveness. They were re-united—in death!

"She is gone. Her errors, I doubt not, will be forgiven by her Supreme Judge, as they were forgiven by her unhappy husband.

"With this sad scene before me, and with poor Sophy's last injunctions fresh in my mind, I will no longer attempt to disguise the feelings I entertain for you, dear Sir Norman. You have won my heart. My hand shall be yours when-

ever you choose to claim it, and my life shall prove the depth of my affection for you.

"I have written this because I shall not see you before I leave, but I should not have shrunk from the avowal. Though I ought not to think of myself at this moment, I feel that I ought to think of *you*.

"Having thus unburthened my heart, let me refer to another matter. I am very uneasy about a certain charming person of our acquaintance, whose thoughtlessness may cause her to fall into the snares which, I fear, are laid for her. I cannot help connecting that villain's secret visit to Hylton Castle with some dark design against her happiness. I may be wrong, but such is my distinct impression. Even if I should see her before I leave, I cannot warn her. But you may warn her—you may save her. Leave no means untried to foil the villain's schemes. Do not let another victim be added to his list.

"By your love for me, I charge you to do this. If plot there be, and you can detect it, thwart it at any hazard. But, for the sake of the infatuated lady, for the sake of all connected with her, do not let exposure take place. I tremble to think of her peril, but I trust you will rescue her from it. Do not abandon your post till this is accomplished. You will be doubly welcome at Hylton Castle when you can relieve my anxiety. Adieu!

"EVA."

Sir Norman was standing beside the fire, thinking over this letter, which had filled him with so many opposite emotions — some sorrowful, some joyous, some wrathful—that he quite forgot that it was necessary to dress for dinner, when a tap was heard at the door. This roused him from his reverie, and he admitted Emile, who had come to help him to take off his hunting habili-

ments. While he was thus employed, the valet espied Eva's letter, which the young baronet had laid upon the table, and he contrived to push it out of the way, though he did not venture to abstract it.

Having hastily made his toilette, Sir Norman went down-stairs, and had just reached the drawing-room door, when suddenly recollecting that he had left Eva's letter on the table, he flew back to his own chamber to secure it. Emile was still there, as he burst suddenly into the room, and Sir Norman almost fancied that he saw the valet take the letter quickly from his breast-pocket and lay it down. But the manœuvre was so quickly executed that he could not feel quite sure, and, snatching up the letter without a word, he hurried down-stairs again.

Rather a dull dinner that day. The sudden departure of Eva and her aunt, or some other circumstance, had damped Mrs. Bootle's spirits

Tired with his day's work, Bootle looked sullen and stupid. Later on in the evening the young men adjourned to the billiard-room, and when preparing to play, Sir Norman took off his coat, and told Emile, who was there as usual, to hang it up. While doing so, the valet felt the pockets; but perceiving that his movements were watched by Sir Norman, he did not venture to take out the letter, and shortly afterwards the young baronet, whose suspicions had been excited, put on the coat again.

On retiring to his own room, Sir Norman took out the letter with the intention of reading it before he sought his couch. To his great surprise, he found that he had obtained possession of a missive from Musgrave to Emile, which the valet, in his haste, had inadvertently substituted for Eva's letter. Hence the rascal's uneasiness.

Sir Norman had not the slightest scruple in

reading the letter, which was in French, and to the following effect:

"You tell me that madame still continues undecided, but exhibits signs of yielding. Why will she not write? She appears awfully afraid of committing herself. Not a single line in answer to all my letters. Cannot L. induce her to send me a few words? Then there could be no retreat. Now she may throw me over at the last moment.

"But a truce to these misgivings. L. is so clever, and has such influence over her mistress, that we cannot fail. It makes me laugh to hear that madame and her spouse quarrel so much. I felt sure I had sown the seeds of discord between them. How well monsieur helps our plan. We could not have a better ally. Madame will not stand such treatment long. She has too much spirit. There must be no reconciliation. L. must take care of that.

"Now, for fear of mistake, I will recapitulate my instructions. We will suppose that all goes well—that madame consents. No step must be taken until three days after her family have left. Three days, mind. Precision is the soul of an enterprise like ours. You will inform me when the time of the departure of the Flaxyards is fixed, so that I may have all ready. On the third day, then, madame will come up to town by the morning train. A pretext for the journey will easily be found — perhaps a short visit to mamma. But madame will arrange this better than I can. You and L. will come with her. I will meet her at the Euston station. Then hey for Dover! The next news of us shall be from Paris.

"There must be no change in this plan, or it may miscarry. I will propose it in a letter to madame. L.'s persuasions, combined with other circumstances, will ensure its accomplishment. I count upon L. and you, because you have both

as much interest in the success of the scheme as I have myself."

Chance seemed to have placed this letter in Sir Norman's hands, in order that the infamous scheme which it revealed might be defeated. Yet how could it be defeated, without fearful consequences to the lady against whom the machinations were directed? Not merely must she be saved, but her reputation must be screened. This might be done, Sir Norman thought, since he was in possession of the details of the scheme. But an apparently insuperable difficulty at once presented itself. Emile's uneasiness had shown that he was aware of the mistake he had made in regard to the letter. How deceive him? Determined to trust to chance, which had so far befriended him, Sir Norman left the letter in his coat pocket, certain that the valet would find it in the morning, and might suppose it had not been read. And it turned

out exactly as he anticipated. Emile, who had passed a sleepless night, came as usual to attend to him in the morning. The valet was full of uneasiness, but was quickly reassured by Sir Norman's manner, and lost no time in carrying off the clothes. By-and-by he reappeared, and, while placing the carefully folded habiliments on a chair, he observed:

"You left a letter with your cigar-case and handkerchief in your coat-pocket last night, Sir Norman. Shall I lay them on the table?"

"Yes," replied the young baronet. "I forgot to take out the things. I was tired last night, and went to bed immediately."

The careless and half-sleepy tone in which this was uttered disarmed the valet's suspicions, and he left the room quite easy. When Sir Norman got up shortly afterwards, he found Eva's letter on the table.

XVIII.

MRS. BOOTLE'S DECISION IS MADE.

EVA'S sudden departure seemed to be the signal for a general dispersion of the company at Belfield. The Flaxyards had intended to remain a little longer, but letters which came by that very morning's post informed the old gentleman and Hornby that their presence in town was required on matters of business; and as such a summons could not be neglected, it was settled that they should leave on the following day. Old Flaxyard would fain have started sooner, but there was a dinner, that day,

at the Huncoats, which Hornby would not forego. How could he disappoint Milicent? Though very sorry to lose his friends, John allowed them to do as they pleased, and we may be sure Mrs. Shelmerdine made no attempt to detain them. Mrs. Bootle said she could not possibly part with dear mamma; but dear mamma, who, if truth must be told, was rather tired of her visit, and had had more than enough of Mrs. Shelmerdine, declared that she must go.

This discussion occurred during breakfast, and while listening to it, Sir Norman thought Mrs. Bootle rather over-acted her part. Notwithstanding her professions to the contrary, it was evident to him that she wanted to get rid of her family. Since everybody else was going, Sir Norman felt he had no excuse for remaining longer, and he therefore announced that he, too, should be obliged to leave on the following day. The intimation was received with ill-disguised satisfaction by Bootle.

After breakfast, Sir Norman tried to obtain a few words in private with Mrs. Bootle. But she was never alone. At last, he contrived to whisper that he had an important communication to make to her, and she told him to come to her boudoir in an hour. Unluckily her reply, though uttered in a low voice, was overheard by Mrs. Shelmerdine, and immediately reported to her son.

At the appointed time Sir Norman proceeded to the boudoir. Mrs. Bootle was there, but her mother was with her. Mrs. Flaxyard, however, immediately arose.

"I understand, Sir Norman, from my daughter that you have something to say to her about Eva," she remarked. "Nothing, I hope, has occurred——"

"Nothing adverse to my happiness," he interrupted. "I have the great satisfaction to inform you that I am accepted. The young lady's decision

was made yesterday, and was conveyed in a letter, which she left for me on her departure."

"I am truly rejoiced to hear it," cried Mrs. Flaxyard. "Pray accept my sincere congratulations. You have indeed won a prize. I can quite understand now what you have to say to my daughter."

And she quitted the boudoir.

"I felt quite sure this would come to pass, Sir Norman," said Mrs. Bootle, as soon as they were alone. "I flatter myself that I have assisted your suit, though whether I have acted a friendly part towards you in doing so time alone can show. But I really think you have a good chance of happiness with Eva, if married people ever are happy, which, from my own experience, I almost begin to doubt."

"I am sorry to hear you speak thus bitterly of married life," he rejoined; "but I trust you are merely jesting with me."

"I speak in sad earnest," she replied. "I will not say that I am wretched—but I am far from happy. I look gay enough in society; but when alone, and the mask is taken off, I am what you see me now."

"How is it possible—situated as you are!—that you can be unhappy?"

"Because——but I will not complain. Perhaps the fault is mine—no doubt it is. Everybody, at least, would say so—would blame me. Apparently, I have everything to make me happy. I ought to be happy. Yet you see how wretched I am!"

And she burst into tears.

"Command yourself, I entreat," cried Sir Norman, "and listen to what I have to say! I am at no loss to understand by what perfidious arts you have been brought to your present unhappy state. I see, only too clearly, the mischief that has been wrought. But be counselled by me.

Do not let your fancied grievances—for fancied they are—induce you to take a false step which will plunge you into real misery."

"A false step! What mean you, Sir Norman?"

"All is known to me. I have discovered the villain's deep-laid design, and would aid you to defeat it. Struggle resolutely against the evil that environs you. Rouse all the good within you. You will then be strong enough to resist him. Yield, and you are lost for ever!"

She hung down her head, and attempted no reply. Amid the silence that prevailed, the door softly opened, and Bootle and his mother entered the boudoir.

"You will not betray me!" murmured the unhappy lady on perceiving them.

"Fear nothing," he replied in a whisper. "You are safe with me."

"Ha! how's this?" cried Bootle, stepping towards his wife. "In tears! What's the matter?"

"I'll tell you some other time," she replied. "I'm not in the mood to give you any explanation now."

"But I insist upon an explanation," he cried. "That is, if you have any to offer. I ask you again how it is that I find you in tears? No use in denying the fact. Your eyes are quite red. What's the matter, I say?"

"Will you permit me to offer you an explanation?" remarked Sir Norman.

"None appears to be necessary," interposed Mrs. Shelmerdine. "It is not customary for my daughter-in-law to manifest so much emotion. I have never known her shed a tear before. No doubt she is grieved at your departure, Sir Norman."

"Madam, you are entirely mistaken, I can assure you."

"If she is grieved because Sir Norman is going, I am not," observed Bootle, with a discordant

laugh. "I should be glad if he would hasten his departure."

"It will be impossible for me to remain longer after these observations," said the young baronet. "But, at least, let me explain——"

"Useless—quite useless! I am not to be imposed upon!" cried Bootle. "I am not so blind as you suppose. I have seen what has been going on. This is not the first time that I have surprised you making love to my wife. You forget the scene in the library on the night of the ball. Explain that, if you can."

"It is easily done, sir, if you will only dismiss your unfounded and, I must say, ridiculous suspicions."

"My unfounded and ridiculous suspicions! ha! When I find my wife closeted with a person whom I know to be in love with her—when I find her profoundly agitated and in tears—I am

told that my suspicions are ridiculous and unfounded—ha! ha!"

"You are behaving most unwisely, sir," said Sir Norman, sternly. "I have always acted as your friend."

"I don't desire your friendship," cried Bootle. "In those confounded French comedies, 'mon meilleur ami' always plays the traitor."

"Then you refuse to listen to me?" said Sir Norman.

"I decline to be made a dupe," rejoined Bootle.

With some difficulty Sir Norman restrained himself. Turning to Mrs. Bootle, he said:

"Pray make my excuses to Mr. Shelmerdine, coupled with my best thanks for his hospitality. I leave my defence in your hands. Adieu!"

Coldly saluting Mrs. Shelmerdine and Bootle, he then left the boudoir. Proceeding to his own room, he rang the bell, and directing Emile to

pack up his trunks, and send them after him to the station, quitted the house.

Leaving him to proceed to Bury, we shall return to the boudoir.

"I shall not endure this any longer, Bootle," cried his wife, as soon as Sir Norman was gone.

"Do as you please," he cried. "If you are for a separation, I shan't oppose it."

"A separation! Oh, darling boy! is it come to this?—so soon!"

"I am no longer a darling boy!" he retorted, savagely. "I am an injured husband — that's what I am."

"You have gone crazy, I believe," said his wife.

"I may well be crazy, after what I have seen and heard in this boudoir. Have you any explanation to give?"

"None! I won't make any."

"My son has a right to be satisfied," said Mrs. Shelmerdine.

"I *will* be satisfied, or——"

"Don't say any more now," interrupted his mother. "Come along!"

And she forced him out of the boudoir.

They had not been gone more than a minute, when Léontine, who had been on the watch, made her appearance. She perfectly understood what had happened, and felt that the moment was propitious to the execution of her scheme.

"Ah, madame!" she exclaimed, in accents of profound commiseration, "what frightful usage you have to submit to!"

"I will submit to it no longer, Léontine," rejoined Mrs. Bootle. "He has threatened me with a separation. Be it so. Dear mamma leaves tomorrow. I shall go with her."

"That would give a complete triumph to Madame Shelmerdine. To send madame back to

her family, beaten, humiliated, is precisely what that dreadful mégère desires. Her task will then be accomplished. In my poor judgment, you ought to take no such course, madame. Either remain here, and defy your vindictive belle-mère, or fly. Were I in your place, madame, I would unhesitatingly embrace the latter alternative."

"I cannot remain here, that is certain, Léontine. That frightful mégère, as you call her, will kill me. She has regained all her influence over my husband, and has quite set him against me."

"That is perfectly true, madame. Monsieur is a totally changed man. Emile and myself have both remarked it. It will be impossible for madame to maintain such an unequal contest. She must yield."

"Never, Léontine! I will fly rather than yield!"

"Then madame decides!" cried the soubrette, with irrepressible satisfaction.

"Yes—no! I cannot decide now. I am bewildered."

"But the moment is come when the decision must be made, madame. Pardon me, if I say you can no longer hesitate. The plan proposed by your adorer must either be carried out or abandoned. Will you write to him?"

"No. Let Emile write."

"To what effect, madame?" asked Léontine, trembling with anxiety.

"To say I will come," replied the other, in a low voice.

"Madame has decided well," cried the soubrette, joyfully. "It shall be done at once."

And she hurried away, fearing lest her mistress should change her mind.

The fatal step was taken. No, not yet taken. Léontine might be recalled. The struggle between

good and ill was still going on in the infatuated lady's breast, when her mother entered the boudoir.

"On what errand is Léontine gone?" cried Mrs. Flaxyard. "She looked exulting as she came out, but became greatly confused on beholding me. I fear there is something wrong going on."

"Don't trouble yourself about Léontine, dear mamma, but direct your attention to me. I require your sympathy—your counsel. I am quite prostrated by a terrible scene which I have just had with Bootle and his mother. Their unjust suspicions have well-nigh distracted me. Will you believe it?—Sir Norman has been sent away! Bootle talks of a separation, and I don't know what."

"This is dreadful! But it must be set right without delay. I will speak to Mr. Shelmerdine myself."

"No, mamma, don't! Perhaps the storm may subside, now that the cause of it—Sir Norman—is removed."

"There is something beyond Sir Norman in the quarrel, I fear," remarked Mrs. Flaxyard. "Has Captain Musgrave nothing to do with it? I must own that I thought Léontine was charged with a secret message to him when I met her just now. If a face ever expressed detected guilt, hers did. I shall always feel uneasy while you retain those French servants. But never mind them now. Do let me try and make up this quarrel between you and Bootle. With Mr. Shelmerdine's aid, I am sure I can do so."

"No, dear mamma, you must let me battle it out. I cannot—will not—humble myself to the old lady. Anything rather than that. If she and Bootle persist in annoying me, I will run up to town, and pass a short time with you at the Acacias."

"Not a bad plan, my dear. Go up with us to-morrow."

"No, thank you, mamma. I would rather wait a few days. Bootle may improve, when we are left to ourselves. But in order to spare dear Mr. Shelmerdine's feelings—for I don't want him, or papa, or even Hornby, to know of this quarrel—you can ask me to come to you. This will serve as an excuse, in case I should find it necessary to take the step."

"I will do as you desire, my dear, though I had far rather have you under my own charge. That dreadful Musgrave haunts me for ever. Don't deceive me. He is not privy to this plan, I trust? He has not suggested it? Mind, I won't allow him to visit at the Acacias."

"He won't even know that I am there, mamma. It is by no means certain that I shall come."

"You have no arrière-pensée in what you have just proposed?"

"Not the slightest, dear mamma. How frightfully suspicious you are!"

"I cannot help it," groaned her mother. "I am full of uneasiness. Do nothing imprudent, my dear child."

"Mamma!"

"Well, I will say no more!" cried Mrs. Flaxyard.

And with a look at her daughter full of maternal anxiety and affection, she left the boudoir.

Léontine was not recalled, and did not reappear till later on in the day. She then informed her mistress that a letter to Captain Musgrave had been sent off by Emile.

So the fatal step was taken.

XIX.

MRS. BOOTLE LEAVES BELFIELD.

THOUGH Mrs. Flaxyard had by no means shaken off her misgivings, and did not feel sure that she was doing right, she complied with her daughter's suggestion, and urged her very strongly to run up and spend a few days at the Acacias. If Bootle did not choose to accompany his wife, he could come and fetch her back. Bootle, who fancied he understood why the proposition was made, offered no objection, but said his wife might please herself; and so the plan was settled.

Mrs. Bootle promised to write to dear mamma as soon as she could fix a day for the visit. Hornby, who, as we know, had an attraction in the neighbourhood, said he should soon run down again, and Mr. Shelmerdine told him to come when he liked—he would always have a room at Belfield. So the Flaxyards took their departure; the old gentleman and his son enchanted with their visit, but Mrs. Flaxyard full of anxiety about her daughter.

As she drove back alone from the station, whither she had accompanied them, Mrs. Bootle felt more wretched than she had ever done in her life. She had parted with her family for ever, for she could not, and did not, expect they would ever see her again, after the fatal step was taken. Her mother's anxious looks and whispered words of counsel filled her with remorse. How fond her mother was of her!—how proud her father was of her!—how [illegible] requiting

their affection? And then Mr. Shelmerdine, who was almost as fond of her as her own father—who had always sided with her—who had steadily refused to believe any ill of her—what would he think of his little pet when he found out how wickedly she had deceived him? He would never allow her name to be breathed in his hearing again. She did not care what Mrs. Shelmerdine might think of her. That implacable woman could not judge her more harshly than she did now. But poor Bootle! he certainly loved her, and how infamously she was acting towards him! If he would only throw himself on his knees, and own he was wrong, she would stay with him. She could not find a single excuse for her conduct. On the contrary, it assumed the darkest dye. She was deceiving and abandoning all who loved her —a father and mother who idolised her—a husband who, foolish as he was, loved her—a splendid home—numberless friends—and for whom? She

did not dare to ask herself that question. Yet she had not power to resist the temptation held out to her.

All these feelings of compunction, we regret to say, were dissipated when she found herself once more closeted with Léontine, and subjected to the evil influence of that designing creature. Léontine, who well knew what mischievous arguments to employ, soon laughed her out of her irresolution, and kept her steady to her purpose. But the weak, misguided lady had now a difficult part to play, and, clever actress as she was, it was almost beyond her powers. If she could have ventured to do so, she would not have left her boudoir; and she almost thought of feigning indisposition, but Léontine discouraged this course. She did not, however, appear till dinner-time, and as there were three or four guests, as usual, she got through the evening tolerably well.

Was it fancy, or did Mr. Shelmerdine

regard her with anxiety? His kindness almost overcame her.

For the first time John seemed to discover that there was some misunderstanding between her and Bootle, and strove to set it right. Mrs. Shelmerdine was colder and more repelling than ever. Perhaps in consequence of what his father said to him, Bootle showed a slight disposition to make up the quarrel; but his mother checked him, and it came to nothing.

Next day, Mrs. Bootle had more remorseful qualms, but they soon yielded to the remedies applied by Léontine and the bitter tonic administered by her mother-in-law.

Poor Bootle was certainly coming round. No doubt about that. Very little encouragement might have brought him round altogether. But he got none. When Mrs. Bootle announced her intention of going up to town on the following day, he seemed half inclined to offer to go with

her; but his mother frowned at him, and the words stuck in his throat. Mrs. Bootle begged to be allowed to take Emile with her, as well as her femme-de-chambre; and Bootle, having the most perfect confidence in the valet, readily assented. Subsequently he gave some private instructions to Emile, to which the valet, laughing in his sleeve, promised careful attention.

Again there was a little dinner-party, so that the evening passed off tranquilly. John told his daughter-in-law that he quite understood why she was going to visit her mamma, but he would engage that all should be right when she came back.

The eventful day arrived. Mrs. Bootle showed no wavering. All preparations had been made by Léontine, who had been secretly employed in packing up the trinkets and other matters that her mistress desired to take with her.

When the time for departure came, and Knowles announced that the carriage was ready, Mr. Shel-

merdine asked Bootle if he did not intend to take his wife to the station; whereupon the foolish fellow, acting upon his mother's advice, replied,

"No, sir, I leave that office to you," and, without a word more, marched off to his own room.

The parting between Mrs. Bootle and her mother-in-law was cold enough, and Mrs. Bootle was glad to hurry away to the carriage, for at that moment she could scarcely repress her emotion. Emile and Léontine were there, and all the boxes having been got in, there was nothing to wait for. So Mrs. Bootle, having taken leave of Belfield for ever, as she supposed, took her seat; John followed; and the carriage was driven off to the station.

No sooner was his wife gone, than Bootle repented his conduct, and, ordering out the dog-cart with the utmost despatch, hurried after her to the station. Perhaps he was too late, for

neither she, nor the vigilant Emile, nor the sharp-eyed Léontine saw him before the train started. Even if he had been there, it was not likely that Mrs. Bootle would have seen him, for her eyes were full of tears. She clung to her father-in-law as if she could not tear herself from him, and when he had assisted her into the coupé, which was reserved for her and Léontine, and bade her an affectionate adieu, she sank back in the carriage in an hysterical state.

John felt very uneasy, but Léontine assured him that her mistress would be better presently; but, in spite of all the soubrette's assiduities, and the application of a powerful vinaigrette, Mrs. Bootle had not recovered when the train started.

Just at the very last moment a person, who had arrived late, with the assistance of the guard managed to spring into a back carriage.

End of the Sixth Book.

BOOK VII.

SAVED.

I.

LAST SCENE BUT ONE OF THE DRAMA.

AFTER many fruitless attempts to enliven her mistress and engage her in conversation, Léontine gave up the attempt in despair, and amused herself as best she could.

Mrs. Bootle continued silent and abstracted till Stafford was reached, when, raising herself for the first time, she let down the window, and, hearing the name of the place bawled out by the railway porters, expressed her surprise that they had got so far.

While she looked out, her attention was draw[illegible]

towards a tall, striking-looking personage, habited in deep mourning, whose handsome but wasted features and long grey beard seemed familiar to her. This gentleman was looking eagerly into the different carriages as if in quest of some one. All at once he caught sight of her, and his glance of recognition told her it was Myddleton Pomfret. In another instant, and before she could draw up the glass, he was beside the coupé.

"I have been looking for you," he cried. "Will you permit me a little private conversation with you—strictly private?" he added, glancing at the soubrette. "I have something of the last importance to say to you."

His manner was so earnest, that, though much frightened, Mrs. Bootle did not hesitate, but desired Léontine to get into another carriage. Upon which Pomfret immediately opened the door to let out the femme-de-chambre. But Léontine did not seem inclined to obey, and addressed some very

determined remonstrances to her mistress, and it was not until Pomfret ordered her in an authoritative tone to descend that she complied.

Just at this moment Emile ran up with the greatest alarm depicted on his sallow countenance. Instead of interfering with the strange gentleman, as Léontine expected, he hurried her off to his own second-class carriage, and left Pomfret to get into the coupé without hindrance. In another moment the door was shut by the guard, and shortly afterwards the train quitted Stafford.

"I ought to offer you a thousand apologies, madam, for this extraordinary proceeding," he began; "but the motive that has induced me to take it will, I hope, plead my excuse."

"I am quite sure you would not act in this manner without adequate reason, Mr. Pomfret," she rejoined. "No apology, therefore, is necessary. But do, pray, tell me by what magical process you knew that I was travelling by this train."

"From whatever source I obtained the information, madam, it would appear to be correct, since I have found you," he rejoined. "You must not forget that your journey to town has long been planned."

"Ah! you learnt it from Sir Norman?" she cried.

"You have guessed rightly," he rejoined. "But I must pray you to listen to me." His voice became sterner as he proceeded:

"You were in Paris when Captain Musgrave was there with his unfortunate bride. You believed he had married a widow, did you not?"

"I was told he had married the widow of Julian Curzon."

"Not the widow. Julian was alive at the time of the marriage—alive, I repeat—but she supposed him dead, and, having mourned him long, deemed herself free to take another husband. She gave her hand to Musgrave, who had practised the

blackest treachery to win her. He knew that Julian lived. He knew that Julian was returning from India—but that knowledge only made him hurry on his devilish scheme. Julian arrived too late. The marriage had taken place. He followed them to Paris. He saw the unfortunate victim. Horrified at the unintentional wrong she had committed, she fled from the wretch who had betrayed her."

"Oh! did he do this?" cried the listener.

"You know with what levity he treated the affair, feeling sure that the terrible secret would be kept by both those whom he had so deeply wronged. But you do *not* know how he subsequently persecuted his victim, driving her almost to madness by forcing himself into her presence. His last visit to her was to obtain money for a purpose which you will easily conjecture, and the violence which he used upon that occasion hastened her death."

"Oh, horror! Can I have loved such a man? I comprehend your object in giving me these dreadful details. You have opened my eyes to the abyss that was yawning before me. Heaven be thanked, it is not too late to retreat! You have come to my rescue. Do not desert me. I may need your support. I will not meet him."

"Can you give me the assurance that you have torn the villain from your breast — that you sincerely repent the step you have taken—and that henceforward you will devote yourself to your husband? Can you answer these questions from your heart, and without mental reserve?"

"I can," she replied, with an earnestness that carried conviction of her sincerity. "I am fully sensible of my folly—my wickedness—but I will err no more. I know not how I could be infatuated by him, but I despise myself for yielding to his arts. You shall find how I will treat him anon."

"You will not see him," said Pomfret, almost solemnly.

"You think he will not keep his appointment."

"He cannot keep it," he rejoined, in the same solemn tone. After a pause, he added, "You cannot doubt who I am."

"You are Julian Curzon—are you not?"

"Yes. I am the unhappy man whose wife was torn from him by that villain—whose existence has been blighted by him. You will wonder why I did not avenge the injury I received; but, while Sophy lived, I could not avenge it. I was forced to bear my wrong in patience. Fate has been kinder to me at the last than it had been before. I had been detained by serious illness in Egypt, and hurried back, incited by a presentiment of ill. I arrived in time to pronounce the forgiveness which she sought—to receive her latest sigh. She expired in my arms. Oh! the agony of that moment! But I will not

recal it—or I shall be utterly unable to proceed. My heart seemed crushed; but when I partially recovered from the shock, I felt some consolation in reflecting that her troubles were over. As I gazed upon her inanimate features—so placid!—so beautiful!—so angelic in expression!—I would not have called her back, even if I had possessed the power. I never quitted her till she was laid in her coffin—and I then bade her an eternal adieu. But I distress you by these details."

"Heed me not! go on! go on, I entreat you!" she cried. "These tears will do me good."

His voice changed as he proceeded:

"It was a simple funeral, yet most touching to all who witnessed it. She was buried in a pretty country churchyard, in a spot which she herself had chosen There were few mourners, but they all mourned deeply. Chief among them were an elderly lady, who loved her as a daughter, and an old female servant, who loved her little

less. Eva and her aunt were there, and at a little distance stood two old men-servants weeping—yes, weeping! Her gentleness, her patience under suffering, had won their hearts."

"She was indeed an angelic creature!" exclaimed the listener.

A moment elapsed before Pomfret could control his emotion. He then went on:

"All was over. The mourners were gone. The assistants at the sad ceremony had departed. One person alone lingered in the churchyard. When the coffin, containing all he loved, was lowered into the ground, he felt that his heart would burst, if he longer repressed his grief, and he hurried away. He now returned to the grave, but with very different emotions. Grief had given place to the fierce desire of vengeance. His eyes were dry. Fire burnt within his breast. As he stood by her grave, he raised his hand to heaven, and vowed never to rest till he had avenged her.

With one last look into the grave, he quitted the churchyard."

"And this is your present purpose!" she cried. "He justly merits death at your hands for the foul wrong he has done her and you. But do not let the thirst of vengeance lead you to throw away your own life. He is a skilful duellist. I dread the result of the encounter."

A singular and almost terrible smile played upon Pomfret's pallid features.

"Hear what I have to tell," he said, in a sombre voice. "Having formed the resolution I have mentioned to you, I entered the carriage that was waiting for me, and drove to Hylton Park, with the intention of taking leave of Eva. I found Sir Norman with her. He had just returned from Belfield. Though the fire of vengeance, only to be quenched by blood, was raging fiercely as ever in my breast, I could not but

rejoice to learn that she had at last consented to make him happy."

"And they will be happy," cried Mrs. Bootle. "I am sure of it."

"They will," said Pomfret, emphatically. "But to proceed. My purpose must have been written in my looks, for Sir Norman instantly divined it. Eva too suspected it, though she did not seek to deter me from its execution. Presently she quitted the room with her aunt, and left me alone with Sir Norman, who added fresh fuel to my wrath by acquainting me with the villain's infamous designs in regard to yourself. Had I not determined to act, Sir Norman himself would have taken measures to defeat them. But he entirely approved of my plan, and, tearing himself from Eva, hurried off with me to town.

"Immediately on our arrival, he proceeded to the hotel at which Musgrave was staying, and

found him there. A meeting was arranged to take place next morning at Calais. As my enemy had the choice of weapons, and was a master of fence, he chose the sword. This was immaterial to me. All I desired was to have him before me. Mine was the righteous cause, and Heaven, I felt sure, would strengthen my arm. Swords were procured. We started by the French mail train, and crossed on a calm starlight night to Calais. Musgrave was accompanied by his friend, Captain Saint-Quintin. During our passage the seconds conferred together, and all was arranged.

"On arriving at Calais, Sir Norman and myself repaired to Quillac's Hotel, as agreed upon. We neither of us retired to rest, but passed the time in conversation, and I gave my friend full instructions as to how he should act in case I fell.

"As soon as it became light, we entered the coach which was waiting for us in the court-yard of the hotel, and drove to the place of rendezvous

—a retired spot, outside the walls, on the road to Boulogne. We were accompanied by a surgeon, and alighting at a little distance from the ground, which was screened from observation by low sand-hills, proceeded to it on foot. Sir Norman carried the swords, wrapped in a cloak, and the surgeon a case of instruments.

"Shortly afterwards my adversary and his second appeared on the ground. Both were smoking, but they threw away their cigars as they came up, and formally saluted us. The seconds then stepped aside to consult, and while they were engaged, we, the principals, prepared for the conflict. It was a sharp frosty morning, and the ground was quite hard, but my breast still burnt like fire, and I did not feel the cold.

"As soon as we were ready, Sir Norman offered the swords to Musgrave, who bowed, took one, and, as he did so, glanced significantly at his second. He felt sure of killing me.

"Taking the other sword, I advanced to meet him. We saluted, and in an instant were engaged. Apparently he was determined to make short work of it. After a few rapid passes, he made a feint, and then, with the quickness of lightning, delivered a thrust, which I successfully parried, and, before he could recover, my sword passed through his heart."

"He is dead!"

"He is dead," echoed Pomfret. "Sophy is avenged."

A pause succeeded. The lady sobbed audibly. Pomfret waited till she became calmer, and then said, sternly,

"He does not deserve your pity. He had but one redeeming quality—courage. He would have betrayed you, as he betrayed all others. Had he ived, you would still be in danger. Yet I must admit that he made a slight attempt at reparation. As he sank into the arms of Saint-Quintin,

who rushed to his assistance, he made an attempt to speak, but, failing to do so, pointed to his coat, which was lying on the ground. Searching it, I found this packet. It contains some letters, which may be of consequence to you."

And he delivered the packet to her.

"Alas! alas!" she cried. "Was I wrong in pitying him?"

"I have no more pity for him than for a wild beast!" cried Pomfret. "But to finish my narration. Seeing he was dead, we left the body to the care of Captain Saint-Quintin and the surgeon, who undertook to make the necessary depositions before the authorities that the man was fairly killed in a duel. We returned by the first packet to Dover. All that then remained for me to do was to acquaint you with the event, and give you the letters. So rapid had been my movements, that I was fortunately in time to accomplish this before any step likely to compromise you could be taken.

And as it was important that I should see you before your arrival in town, I came on to Stafford."

"Oh! how can I thank you!" she cried. "You have, indeed, saved me!"

"You owe no thanks," he rejoined. "I thought only of avenging Sophy, when I slew him. But since I have been instrumental in saving you, I am entitled to give you a piece of counsel."

"I will obey you implicitly. What is it you enjoin?"

"Immediately on your arrival in town, dismiss those French servants, who have aided Musgrave's base design. Fear nothing from them. They are harmless now their employer is gone. Sir Norman came with me to Stafford, and is in another part of the train. We shall see him at the Euston station. Leave him to deal with them."

"It had already occurred to me to act as you suggest. But I felt afraid to take so decisive a

step, knowing how completely I am in the power of the perfidious wretches."

"Get rid of them. I repeat, you have nothing now to fear. Proceed at once to your father's house, and then write to your husband."

"I will—I will!" she cried. "I will acknowledge all my faults—make my peace with him—and entreat him to come for me."

Pomfret showed no disposition to continue the conversation, and his stern expression as he sat back in his corner almost alarmed his companion. The silence was prolonged till they were nearing London, when she addressed him.

"Forgive me if I venture to ask what you now propose to do?" she inquired, glancing at him timidly.

"I shall proceed without delay to India," he rejoined, in a sombre tone. "All my arrangements are made. I have no further business here. Nor

shall I return. The last tie that bound me to this country is sundered."

"Time will soften your affliction, and then you will think differently," she rejoined. "Fresh feelings will be awakened in your breast. You are yet young enough to love again."

"Love again!" he exclaimed, bitterly. "Never! My only desire is to rejoin her I have lost."

II.

THE LAST SCENE.

WHEN they arrived at the Euston station, Pomfret got out first, and assisted his companion to alight. At the same moment Sir Norman and Bootle—yes, Bootle himself, to his wife's amazement!—descended from a back carriage, and hastened towards her. It was evident from their manner that a perfectly good understanding subsisted between them.

"What! darling boy, is that you?" she cried. "This is indeed an agreeable surprise. Have you really travelled in the same train with me?"

"Yes, I have," he rejoined. "I was so miserable when you left me, that I hurried off to the station, and just got there in time to spring into one of the hind carriages. I should have joined you at Stafford, but Sir Norman stopped me, as he wished to give me some explanation. I now know all."

The young baronet gave her a reassuring look, which informed her that the darling boy did not quite know *all*.

"I've been a great fool to quarrel with you," pursued Bootle. "But I'm very sorry, and promise never to be jealous again."

"And I'll never give you cause to be jealous again, dearest boy, be sure of that," she rejoined. "I ought to ask forgiveness. I'm far more in fault than you."

"Well, I won't attempt to justify my conduct. I know it's inexcusable," said Bootle. "But I may say that my absurd jealousy of Sir Norman

—for I now know how absurd it was—was entirely caused by some remarks made by that diabolical Musgrave, who, I am glad to learn, has met with his deserts."

"Yes, he'll trouble you no longer," said Sir Norman. "Mr. Pomfret," he added, presenting that gentleman, "has freed you from a designing villain."

"I am greatly obliged to you, I am sure, Mr. Pomfret," said Bootle. "I should have been obliged to take him in hand myself if you had not got the start of me."

"I had deep wrongs to redress," observed Pomfret.

"Of course I don't mean to compare my wrongs with yours," said Bootle. "But the scoundrel behaved infamously in setting me against Sir Norman. Shall I tell you what he said, my dear?" he added to his wife.

"On no account, darling boy. It would be

useless to do so now. I am only surprised that you could lend an ear to his base insinuations, since you knew how passionately Sir Norman is attached to Eva."

"I was an idiot, as I have already owned," said Bootle.

"Then since you are perfectly convinced of your error in regard to Sir Norman," remarked Pomfret, "let me have the satisfaction of hearing that all your doubts are dissipated. Of Musgrave you had cause to be jealous—but he is gone."

"And with him every doubt has vanished," said Bootle. "I must own that I felt a little jealous of you, Mr. Pomfret, when I beheld you get into the carriage with my wife. But Sir Norman soon dispelled my fears. And to prove the opinion I entertain of you, I beg to say that there is no person—not even Sir Norman himself

—whom I shall be more delighted to welcome at Belfield than you."

"I am starting at once for India," rejoined the other. "Consequently, I cannot have the pleasure of visiting you."

"Well, when you return, then."

"I shall never return."

While this conversation took place, Emile and Léontine had been occupied in getting together the things. Both were exceedingly uneasy, wondering what would happen. They now came forward, and Emile inquired of his master if he should engage a cab.

"For yourself and the drôlesse with you, if you think proper, malheureux, but not for me and Mrs. Bootle," rejoined our young friend, haughtily. He had been cautioned by Sir Norman.

"Comment, monsieur!" cried Emile. "Perhaps you will be good enough to express yourself more clearly."

"Allez au diable! You are both discharged. Is that clear?"

"Discharged, at a moment's notice! Monsieur cannot mean what he says!"

"But I do mean it, gredin. I have no further occasion for your services. Here's payment for your wages," he added, taking out a pocket-book, and giving him a couple of bank-notes. "Ten for yourself—a fiver for Léontine."

"You will interfere, madame? You will not permit this injustice to be done?" cried the soubrette, rushing up to Mrs. Bootle.

"I shall not interfere at all," returned the lady, coldly. "I entirely approve of the proceeding. You can both go about your business."

"Not yet, madame. I have some revelations to make to monsieur. I shall show him how he has been duped."

"No, you won't," said Bootle. "Monsieur re-

fuses to listen to any of your revelations. He is quite aware of all your tricks."

"Shall I take any message from madame to Captain Musgrave?" inquired Emile, spitefully.

"Yes, if you can find him," rejoined Bootle. "But you'll have to seek him below. He was killed in a duel yesterday."

"Milles diables! tué!" ejaculated Emile, recoiling. "Allons donc, Léontine!"

And he hurried away with the soubrette.

While the scene just described took place, Myddleton Pomfret stood apart; but at its termination, and when the French servants were gone, he advanced towards Mrs. Bootle, with the evident design of bidding her farewell. But before he could offer his adieux, she flew towards him, and, yielding to her impulsive nature, seized his hand, and cried,

"You must not—shall not—leave us in this

manner. Do remain with us for a month—even for a week—and if no change takes place in your feelings during that time, I will no longer try to prevent your departure. But give me an opportunity of proving the gratitude I owe you. We will do all we can to soothe your affliction. Stay with us, I entreat you!"

"I am fully sensible of your kindness," he rejoined, gently, but firmly. "But my resolution is taken."

"I am afraid your efforts to induce my poor friend to change his purpose will be as ineffectual as my own," said Sir Norman, coming towards them with Bootle. "I have employed every argument — but in vain. Though, as you are aware, he is Eva's guardian, and ought to give her away, he will not remain for our nuptials."

"My presence at your marriage would be ominous," said Pomfret. "You are better without me."

"Still, neither Eva's happiness nor mine will be complete unless you are present," urged Sir Norman.

"Stay, and make us all happy!" cried Mrs. Bootle.

"Time was when I could not have resisted such an appeal; but I must resist it now," said Pomfret. "My task is ended. I rejoice to think that I have removed some few thorns from your path, so that henceforward your course will be unobstructed. Heaven keep you in it! Farewell, madam! farewell for ever!"

Pressing her hand gently, he bowed to her husband, and, taking Sir Norman's arm, quitted the platform with him.

She continued gazing after him till he was lost to sight, and then sighed deeply, feeling sure she should never behold him again.

Shortly afterwards Bootle came to hand her to a cab, in which her luggage had been placed

by a railway porter. They then drove to the Acacias, where, though quite unexpected, they were most warmly welcomed by Mrs. Flaxyard, who was truly rejoiced to find that a reconciliation had taken place between them.

The news imparted by her daughter astonished and delighted Mrs. Flaxyard. She had no fears for the future, since the French servants were discharged, and Captain Musgrave effectually removed. On his return from the city with Hornby, old Flaxyard, who knew nothing about the quarrels of the young couple, was immensely delighted to see them, and laughed very heartily when he learnt that Bootle would not be left behind, but had come up with his wife, though in a separate carriage. He, too, was glad that Emile and Léontine were gone. Hornby was of the same opinion, and both father and son thought it a good job that Musgrave had been disposed of.

There is generally a tolerable dinner at the

Acacias, go when you will, and invariably good wine. Bootle felt so comfortable after emptying a bumper of his father-in-law's unexceptionable claret, that he wondered how he could ever have been such a fool as to quarrel with his pretty little wife, who smiled at him so bewitchingly from the opposite side of the table.

But we have been getting on too fast, and must go back for a moment to Pomfret and Sir Norman. On quitting the station they proceeded to the Euston Hotel, and on the way thither Pomfret remarked:

"All is arranged in regard to Eva's property. I have given full instructions in writing to my solicitor, Mr. Wilson, of Lincoln's Inn-fields, and have appointed Mr. Flaxyard and Mr. Shelmerdine trustees under the marriage settlement, with Mr. Wilson. I hope this meets with your approval.

"Entirely so," said Sir Norman.

"One word more, and I have done," pursued Pomfret. "My will is lodged with Mr. Wilson. You and Eva have an interest in it. Therefore, if anything happens to me, apply to him. It may not be long before the application will be necessary."

"I wish I could remove this melancholy impression from your mind," observed Sir Norman.

"Impossible," rejoined the other. "My release cannot be far off. When you hear of it, rejoice."

At the door of the Euston Hotel a carriage was drawn up, in which sat Eva and her aunt. Expecting to find his ward there, Pomfret was fully prepared, as he thought, for a short parting interview with her. But all his firmness now deserted him.

As he approached the carriage with Sir Norman, Eva would have alighted, but he motioned her to sit still. Straining her hand, he gazed at

her for a moment with inexpressible tenderness, and the look was never effaced from her memory.

Quite overcome by emotion, he then murmured in broken accents:

"All my wishes are known to Sir Norman. He will explain them to you. Heaven bless you, and grant you years of uninterrupted happiness! Farewell for ever!"

He then plunged into the hotel. Sir Norman did not attempt to follow him, and neither he nor Eva saw the unhappy man again.

EPILOGUE.

A very few words will suffice to complete our Tale.

The ill-fated Julian Curzon (for we will now restore to him his rightful name, though he himself never resumed it) died on his voyage to India, and is buried at Madras.

On reference to the will, which was deposited with Mr. Wilson, and, indeed, had been prepared by that gentleman, it appeared that Julian had bequeathed a lack of rupees to Eva, and a like sum to Sir Norman. The residue of his property, which amounted to nearly six thousand pounds, was left to Celia Leycester.

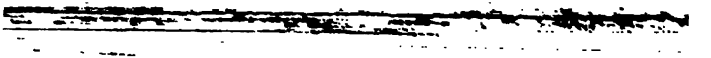
Before the sad tidings came of the death of their friend, the nuptials of Sir Norman and Eva had been solemnised. They are now residing at Hylton Castle, which has been completely restored, and is now what it used to be in the days of Sir Norman's progenitors—one of the finest places in Surrey.

Another wedding, which took place about the same time as that just mentioned, has to be recorded. Hornby Flaxyard was united to Milicent Huncoat, and the marriage promises well. Hornby may be considered a lucky fellow, for he got a very good fortune with his wife. They

have fixed their residence in Westbourne-terrace, and live in capital style.

Bootle is darling Bootle still, and idolises his pretty little wife, who has left off flirting, and has become very fond of him. They are now at Belfield.

Mrs. Bootle gets on better than she did with her austere mother-in-law—though they have an occasional wrangle—but the little lady still retains as firm a hold as ever upon the affections of worthy Mr. Shelmerdine.

THE END.

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